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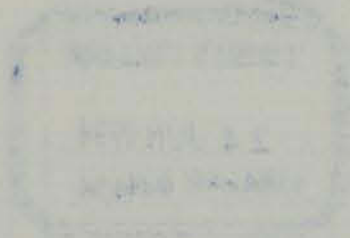
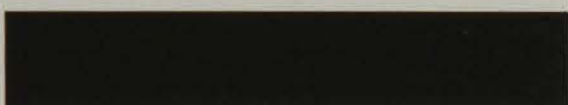
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THE IRISH CATHOLIC SECULAR CLERGY

1850-1900

Aspects of a social history of the Irish Catholic secular clergy 1850-1900



Liam Bane



THE IRISH CATHOLIC SECULAR CHURCH

1850-1900

THE IRISH CATHOLIC SECULAR CHURCH



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SUMMARY

The object of this thesis is to examine critically certain aspects of the social life and activities of the Irish Catholic secular clergy in the second half of the nineteenth century. The areas selected for study are the origins, training and education of the clergy, relations between parish priests and curates, income and status, financial management, social life and pastimes, problems of discipline, relations with the laity and finally, sickness and old age.

This study is based principally on the primary source material available in Catholic diocesan archives throughout the country and, while many archives are deficient in relevant material, there is adequate material surviving to present an objective, comprehensive picture of the particular topics chosen. Use is also made of other available material, both primary and secondary, which is considered relevant to this particular study. In addition, copies of some 660 clerical wills have been collected and examined with a view to providing information about the extent of the wealth and property accumulated by priests of all dioceses in this period and about the legatees and beneficiaries of clerical wills.

The overall picture that emerges of the Roman Catholic church in Ireland in the latter half of the nineteenth century is that of an institution growing in confidence and power. With a more centralised and efficient administration and a more competent and better equipped clerical workforce, the Catholic church succeeded in building an impressive and substantial material empire. The secular priests, drawn mainly from the middle classes and farming sectors of society, were carefully selected and trained at Maynooth college in a manner designed to produce obedient and loyal servants. They were central figures in the massive building programme which was undertaken and they were involved in all aspects of the building projects from selection and purchase of sites to responsibility for funding and the management of finances.

The Catholic secular priests, relying entirely on the voluntary contributions of the laity, succeeded in achieving a satisfactory *modus vivendi* and a relatively high standard of living. While they did present a united front in matters of dogma and church policy, relationships between individual priests were sometimes strained, with the collection and division of parochial finances presenting particular problems. There is little evidence of intellectual dissent and in their personal lives, the main problem that is evident is that of the abuse of alcohol. In general, priests were faithful in their observance of the compulsory celibate lifestyle. A number of priests did succeed in

accumulating substantial amounts of wealth and property and thus gave substance to the popular perception of the priest as a man with an undue interest in collecting money.

In their relations with the laity, the Catholic priest presents as an important and influential figure, often acting in an autocratic manner. There is strong evidence to suggest the emergence of a clerical caste, of clerics who are conscious of their role and status and confident of their right to interfere in all matters involving the laity, whether political, social or personal.

Finally, as regards sickness and old age, this study shows how a social security system was organised for celibate clerics for whom illness represented a particular threat. In the matter of clerical pensions, the situation was less satisfactory, as generally amounts of pensions were decided arbitrarily by the diocesan authorities or as a result of negotiations between individual clerics and their superiors.

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Introduction

The present study is a study of the history of the Catholic Church in Ireland from the time of the arrival of the missionaries in the fifth century to the present day. It is a study of the role of the Church in the development of the Irish nation and the role of the Church in the life of the Irish people.

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I wish to state that this thesis has not been presented to any institution other than Trinity College, Dublin for the purposes of obtaining a degree. I also wish to state that this thesis is entirely my own work.

The primary source material for this study is the records of the various diocesan archives in Ireland. These records are the records of the bishops and their staffs and they contain a wealth of information about the life of the Church in Ireland. The records are arranged in chronological order and they cover the period from the time of the arrival of the missionaries in the fifth century to the present day.

List of abbreviations

- ArdDA - Ardagh Diocesan Archives
- ArmDA - Armagh Diocesan Archives
- CDA - Cashel Diocesan Archives
- DDA - Dublin Diocesan Archives
- EDA - Elphin Diocesan Archives
- NA - National Archives
- NIPRO - Northern Ireland Public Record Office
- NL - National Library
- RDA - Raphoe Diocesan Archives

Introduction

In recent years, a good deal of attention has been focussed on the political activities of the nineteenth century Irish Catholic clergy. In this respect, the work of Emmet Larkin in particular offers a detailed examination of the role and influence of Catholic bishops and priests in political affairs in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In this study, it is proposed to look at aspects of the social history of the Irish secular clergy in the second half of the nineteenth century in an attempt to discover what kind of men they were who wielded such power and influence in their own communities and nationally. What was their social background and training? What income and status did they enjoy? What were the problems of discipline which were most common at this time? It is proposed also to examine the lifestyle and pastimes of the clergy, their relations with the laity and the manner in which they managed their finances in this era of notable expansion for the Irish Catholic church.

The primary source material for this study comes principally from the diocesan archives. An examination of the situation in diocesan archives nationally reveals that there is, unfortunately, a dearth of nineteenth century material. Reports from dioceses such as Achonry, Clonfert, Derry, Down and Connor, Dromore, Killala, Killaloe, Kilmore, Limerick and Meath show that there is little or no material relevant to this study surviving. It would appear that moving to new episcopal residences has had disastrous consequences for the retention of archival material. In dioceses like Waterford, which had five changes of episcopal residence, valuable source material disappeared. In the diocese of Tuam, the appointment of John MacEivilly as archbishop to succeed John MacHale in 1881 resulted in the abrupt departure of MacHale's nephew and secretary, Thomas, who went to the U.S. and took with him his uncle's priceless collection of letters and documents. Later, in this same diocese, another change of residence meant the loss of further episcopal correspondence. Similarly, it is believed that when Patrick F. Moran of Ossory became archbishop of Sydney in 1872, he brought with him archival material. In some dioceses at present, such as Cork and Cloyne, efforts are being made to organise and classify whatever material survives and access is denied for the time being. In Ferns and Kildare, it is hoped to commence work on producing catalogues but there is very little nineteenth century material. Most disappointing, too, is the lack of any significant material at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

On the positive side, material of which most use is made comes from the diocesan archives of Dublin, Cashel, Elphin, Armagh, Clogher, Ardagh and Raphoe. Of these, the Dublin archives, which are sited at Clonliffe College, contain by far the most comprehensive and extensive collection of letters and documents covering the reigns of three archbishops. After that, the Cashel archives, sited at St. Patrick's College, Thurles but with much of the material available on microfilm at the National Library Dublin, have also a valuable collection of interesting letters and manuscripts from the reigns of three archbishops. A very useful calendar of the Cashel collection has been published by Dom Mark Tierney in *Archivium Hibernicum*, while summaries of the diaries of Bishop David Moriarty of Kerry can be found in issues of the *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*. The material in the Armagh archives is concerned principally with the episcopacy of Joseph Dixon, while the Elphin material relates only to Laurence Gillooly, whose episcopacy covers most of the period. There is a very interesting and valuable collection of letters and documents from the episcopacy of Bartholomew Woodlock, bishop of Ardagh in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and this is posited at Bishop's House, Longford. The Clogher material, which is available at the Northern Ireland Record Office, Belfast, relates to the episcopacy of James Donnelly and is rather sketchy. There is not very much of interest in the Galway archives and much of the material that has survived is concerned with documenting the dispute between Bishop John MacEivilly and Fr. Peter Daly. Raphoe has a fairly substantial collection of letters from the episcopacy of James McDevitt but only limited access was granted.

It should be pointed out, however, that although it might seem that the number of useful diocesan archives is small, the material which is available does offer a broad, representative view of nineteenth century Catholic church affairs. Dublin offers us a picture of a large populous diocese, which ranges from affluent city parishes to more remote, less wealthy rural parishes. Cashel represents the more affluent rural diocese with its strong farming community while Ardagh and Elphin represent the dioceses where the clergy relied for their support on small businessmen and tenant farmers. The dioceses of Clogher, Armagh and Raphoe represent the northern dioceses, where the existence of other denominations was a factor which lent an added dimension to the need to support one's church. It is evident from an examination of the material in the various archives that, in fact, the needs, the problems and the practices of the clergy of the different dioceses do follow a pattern and hence, it can be assumed that the profile of the clergy of these dioceses does constitute a national profile that is valid for the Irish Catholic secular clergy of the second half of the nineteenth century.

A number of people must be thanked. David Sheehy, archivist at the Dublin diocesan archives was most patient and helpful, as also were Fr. Gerry Dolan, Bishop's secretary, Elphin; Bishop Colm Reilly of Ardagh; the late Cardinal Tomas O Fiaich; Fr. Christy O'Dwyer of Cashel; Bishop Seamus Hegarty and Fr. John Silke of Raphoe; Monsignor Michael Olden, former president of Maynooth College; the respective staffs of the National Archives and the National Library Dublin and the Northern Ireland Public Record Office Belfast. Dom Mark Tierney of Glenstal Abbey was, as always, most generous in granting unlimited access to his valuable private collection of documents. I am most grateful to friends Padraic Gallagher and Fred Goulding for their help and guidance with statistical analysis and computer work. A special word of gratitude to Professor Louis Cullen of Trinity College Dublin who was my supervisor in this undertaking. He was most supportive and encouraging, especially at those times when "returning were as tedious as go o'er". Frances, once again I am in your debt for showing such patience and understanding over what must have seemed an interminable length of time.

Liam Bane

January 1994

Chapter One

Origins, Training and Education

The British prime minister, Sir Robert Peel, is the one who emerges as the unlikely hero in considering the evolution of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth as a pivotal institution in the training and education of the Irish Catholic secular clergy in the nineteenth century and consequently, in Irish social and religious affairs. Ironically perhaps, it was Peel's single-minded advocacy of Maynooth College and his determination that the college grant should be increased in 1845 that were the crucial factors in the development of the college in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The grant was increased from £8,928 to £26,360. In addition, there was a capital grant of £30,000 towards the erection of new buildings and towards carrying out much needed repairs on existing buildings.¹

The college centenary historian, John Healy, refers to the passing of the 1845 act as the most important event that took place in the history of the college since its foundation in 1795. He also lists the benefits that accrued as a result of the increased grant. Members of staff received a substantial increase in salary. The president's salary was set at £594.12s. per annum; the vice-president's salary was £326.12s.8d., while professors' salaries ranged from £264.12s.8d. to £241.12s.8d. per annum.² Student capacity was also increased and numbers rose from 438 in April 1844 to 515 in April 1853. By 1895 the total number of students at the college was 614.³ New buildings were added and the material comforts of the students were improved. "In all these respects", Healy comments wryly, "the increased grant conferred many substantial benefits on the students - some people indeed thought too many; because, as they alleged, the students were better off in college than they could hope to be afterwards as curates, at least in the poorer parts of the country".⁴

Another important concession in the Act was the provision of a maintenance grant of £28 per annum for 500 students - 250 students in the three senior classes and 250 in the four junior classes.⁵ This meant that access to the national seminary was now possible for students from poorer families and that accommodation could be provided for students who might otherwise have opted for the missionary colleges

¹John Healy, *Maynooth College 1795-1895*, (Dublin 1895), pp. 414-5.

²*Ibid.* p.417.

³*Ibid.* p. 732.

⁴*Ibid.* pp. 418-9.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 414.

either at home or abroad. The increased grant had consequences for local diocesan seminaries, such as those at Carlow, Kilkenny, Thurles, Waterford and Wexford. The number of students for Irish dioceses at the Kilkenny college fell sharply and even the local diocese, Ossory, sent 15 students to Maynooth to avail of the more favourable terms.⁶ From 1880 to 1900, St. Patrick's College, Thurles, became an almost exclusively missionary seminary and a similar pattern was evident in the Waterford and Wexford colleges.⁷ St. Patrick's College, Carlow, which could boast of being the oldest seminary in the country, had 38 priests ordained for Irish dioceses and 28 for foreign dioceses in the academic year 1849/50. For the year 1897/98, the figures are 15 priests for Irish dioceses and 112 priests for the foreign missions.⁸

By 1875, the great majority of Irish diocesan priests were being trained at Maynooth. In 1850, 24 Maynooth trained priests were ordained; in 1870, the figure was 68 and in 1899, there was an exceptionally high figure of 110 priests ordained.⁹ Over the half century 1850-1900, there were only 35 priests ordained for foreign dioceses and 21 for ten different religious orders. Irish dioceses, too, still sent students occasionally to the surviving continental colleges at Rome, Paris and Salamanca. But certainly, despite the vote of no confidence by Paul Cullen who established Clonliffe College in 1859 to educate priests for Dublin diocese, Maynooth College became synonymous with the Irish Catholic secular priesthood.

Social Background

It is difficult to assess accurately the social composition of the student body at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth in the post-Famine years. This difficulty stems mainly from the failure of the college authorities to record any information about the social background or origins of students. For a start, we can dispense with the assertions of those nineteenth century authors who claimed that all Maynooth students were the sons of peasants or taken from the lowest classes of society. For example, Daniel Madden in his book, **Ireland and Its Rulers**, describes the Irish catholic clergy as "one conglomerate mass" and states that they were all taken "from the humblest classes in

⁶ Feargus O Fearghail, **St. Kieran's College Kilkenny 1782-1982**, (Kilkenny 1982), p.52.

⁷ This information is taken from an unpublished paper, The Provision of Irish Priests for Abroad 1840-1900 by Fr. John McEvoy, who is at present writing a bicentennial history of Carlow College.

⁸ P. Brophy, *The Carlovian*, 7, Table B, quoted in Emmet Larkin, Economic Growth, Capital Investment and the Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth Century Ireland, *American Historical Review*, vol. lxxii, April 1967, footnote p. 865.

⁹ Patrick J. Hamell, **Maynooth Students and Ordinations Index 1795-1895**, (Maynooth 1982), pp. 21-2.

society".¹⁰ Later, he says that the priesthood was looked down upon by young men of the middle classes, leaving the church to recruit from "the families of humble farmers and the peasantry".¹¹ Another commentator, S. M. Hussey, had this to say: "The greatest curse to the Irish nation has been Maynooth, because it fostered the ordination of peasants' sons. These are uneducated men who have never been out of Ireland, whose sympathies are wholly with the class from which they have sprung and who are given no training calculated to afford them a broader view than that of the narrowest class prejudice".¹² A statement, which in itself, smacks of narrow class prejudice.

In fact, from a consideration of the available evidence, the profile of the Maynooth student offered by the president of the college, Bartholomew Crotty, to the Royal Commission of Inquiry of 1826-27 seems to hold true for the following years. Crotty maintained that the students were "generally the sons of farmers, who must be comfortable in order to meet the expenses... of tradesmen, shopkeepers and not a very small proportion of them are the children of opulent merchants and rich farmers and graziers....".¹³ This is supported by James Browne, a professor at the college, who, in his evidence, described the students of his own diocese, Ferns, as the "children of respectable farmers, of shopkeepers or people in business in the town". When pressed on the point that farmers from Wexford might be in more comfortable circumstances than the rest of the country, Browne summed it up neatly in this comment: "They are comfortable but not rich; their farms are small, but they are a very industrious and comfortable people".¹⁴

"Comfortable" is certainly the word that applies to the families of the nineteenth century clergy of Co. Tipperary, as is clear from the interesting and useful study undertaken by James O'Shea for his book, **Priest, Politics and Society in Post-Famine Ireland**. According to O'Shea, the vast majority of Tipperary priests, who ministered between the years 1850 and 1891 and whose birthplaces are known, came from farming stock. In all, O'Shea lists 135 priests with farming backgrounds who ministered in Co. Tipperary during the years 1851-1890 and, since some of the families had multiple holdings, the total number of holdings comes to 214. For the purposes of the calculations in Table 1 below, where there are multiple holdings, the combined acreage has been totalled to represent one family farm. The total number of farms then

¹⁰ Daniel Owen Madden, **Ireland and Its Rulers**, (London 1844), p.252.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 255.

¹² S.M. Hussey, **Reminiscences of an Irish Land Agent**, (London 1904), p.116.

¹³ *Eighth Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education: Roman Catholic College of Maynooth*, PP 1826-7, xiii, p. 58.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 150.

is 122 and the apparent discrepancy between this figure and the number of priests is explained by the fact that the list of 135 priests includes sets of brothers.¹⁵

Table 1

Acreage of farms held by families of priests in Co. Tipperary 1850-1891

Total number of farms: 122

Acres	15-49	50-99	100-149	150-199	200+	300+
No. of farms	20 (16%)	32 (26%)	33 (27%)	20 (16%)	13 (11%)	4 (3%)

There were 70 families or 57% of the total who possessed farms of 100 acres or more, while in the lowest category, under 50 acres, there were only 20 families or 16% of the total. O' Shea also makes the telling point that not only were the farms extensive but they were fertile too and the valuation of the 214 holdings breaks down as follows:

Table 2

Breakdown of valuation of total holdings (214)

Valuation:	Under 10s. per acre	Over 10s. per acre
	38 (18%)	176 (82%)

14 of the farms under 10s. were in Clare and one Limerick family had 10 holdings under 10s.¹⁶

Some of the farms listed were very substantial. One priest, James Caher, came from a Clare farm of 336 acres valued at 7s. per acre; the family of Martin Laffan had four holdings amounting to 328 acres with valuations from 7s. to 11s.; John Layne's family farmed 377 acres (10 holdings with valuations from 5s. to 10s.). The well known Cashel levitical family, the Fennellys, had a total of 789 acres between four families and most spectacular of all, the family of William O'Donnell could boast of

¹⁵ These calculations are based on figures given in James O'Shea, *Priest, Politics and Society in Post-Famine Ireland*, (Dublin 1983), Table 2, pp. 307-12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Table 2, p.312.

two holdings amounting to 502 acres valued at 19s. per acre.¹⁷ Sons of peasants indeed!

It is obvious that not all diocesan priests in the country could boast of such comfortable backgrounds and it must be assumed that the students from the western counties in particular had much more modest antecedents. Maynooth historian, John Healy, obviously echoing Crotty, concluded: "The students of the College were generally the sons of substantial farmers or graziers or shopkeepers and merchants in the town".¹⁸ This does not contribute very much to the discussion. However, there can be little doubt but that the majority of Maynooth students at any given time in this period were sons of farmers, great and small. If, then, 'peasants' is taken as a generic term for farmers, the earlier observations are accurate. If, however, as certainly seems to be the case, the term is used pejoratively to indicate those from the poorer farming class and poorly educated, then these generalisations are wide of the mark. It is difficult to find fault with K. Theodore Hoppen's conclusion when he writes: "One firm conclusion stands out amidst the ambiguities of the evidence; very few priests came from any section of rural society below that of 'modest farmer'".¹⁹

This predominance of those from farming backgrounds is borne out by an examination of the directory, compiled by O'Shea, of secular priests in Co. Tipperary during the years 1850 to 1891. In all, O'Shea profiles briefly 575 priests. Of this number, he refers to the social background of 222 and of this 222, 189 priests or 85% come from farming backgrounds. In the case of some of the priests, where there is no specific information, their background is described in a general way as belonging to an "ancient" family or an "old and respected family", which may well mean that their families were significant landholders. The social origins of the remainder vary and include a butcher, a civil engineer and an apothecary. Four Cashel priests came from families which owned hotels and three had fathers whose occupations are given as blacksmith and farmer.²⁰

Again the predominance of a farming background is reflected in the social composition of the nineteenth century Catholic hierarchy. Of 28 bishops whose background can be traced accurately, 12 are listed as belonging to farming families, while it is probable that at least 6 others, whose background is described in a general

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Table 2, pp. 307-12.

¹⁸ Healy, *op. cit.*, p.239.

¹⁹ K. Theodore Hoppen, **Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland 1832-1885**, (Oxford 1984), p.177.

²⁰ O'Shea, *op. cit.*, Directory of Secular Priests in County Tipperary 1850 to 1891, pp. 326-356; Walter Skehan, *Index of Priests of Cashel and Emly*, CDA.

way, were also farmers. Of this 12, most belonged to well-to-do families. Daniel Murray of Dublin came from a family that farmed 160 acres;²¹ Paul Cullen's family farmed between 600 and 700 acres in Co. Kildare;²² the family of Thomas Furlong of Ferns are described as "large farmers"²³ and Abraham Brownrigg, bishop of Ossory, came from "an old and most respectable family" in Wexford.²⁴ David Moriarty, bishop of Kerry, came from a wealthy landowning family and he received part of his early education at a private school at Boulogne-sur-Mer.²⁵ Only 2 of the 28 bishops came from families that could be described as poor. Patrick Duggan of Clonfert described himself as "a peasant's son"²⁶ and Edward McCabe came from a poor Dublin family.²⁷ The grandfather of Edward O'Dwyer of Limerick was a large landholder and his father was an excise officer.²⁸ The father of Patrick Leahy of Cashel was a civil engineer²⁹ and Thomas Croke's father a land agent and shopkeeper.³⁰ The family of Michael Slattery of Cashel were well-to-do farmers and Slattery himself was a law student at Trinity College Dublin before entering the priesthood.³¹ James MacDevitt of Raphoe and Patrick F. Moran of Ossory belonged to merchant families³² and the parents of both John Kilduff and George Conroy of Ardagh were described as "wealthy".³³ Most unusual perhaps was the background of William Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin, whose father was a watchmaker in the city of Dublin.³⁴ From all of this, then, it would appear that it was those who came from the more affluent and well-to-do families who were the achievers in the ecclesiastical profession in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

²¹ Evelyn Bolster, The Last Will and Testament of Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin, *Collectanea Hibernica* 1979-80, pp.149-50.

²² M. J. Curran, Cardinal Cullen: Biographical Materials, *Reportorium Novum*, vol.1 no.1, p.223.

²³ Healy, *op. cit.*, p.562.

²⁴ William Carrigan, **History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory**, vol. 1, (Dublin 1905), p.232.

²⁵ Kieran O'Shea, David Moriarty (1814-77), *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society* 1970, pp. 85-7.

²⁶ Wilfred S. Blunt, **The Land War in Ireland**, (London 1912), p. 72; Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p.176.

²⁷ Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

²⁸ John Begley, **The Diocese of Limerick 1691 to present day**, (Dublin 1938), pp.563-4.

²⁹ James O'Shea, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

³⁰ Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

³¹ Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 176; Donal A. Kerr, **Peel, Priests and Politics**, (Oxford 1982), p.16.

³² William Maziere Brady papers, Ms. 8608 (18),NL; Carrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

³³ James J. MacNamee, **History of the Diocese of Ardagh**, (Dublin 1954), p. 461; John Monahan, **Records relating to the Dioceses of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise**, (Dublin 1886), pp. 209, 288.

³⁴ Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p.176.

Levitical Families

A study of O'Shea's directory and the comprehensive directory of the priests of Cashel and Emly compiled by Walter Skehan reveals another interesting feature - the extent to which brothers and sisters within the same family were influenced in choosing careers as priests and nuns. In Cashel, over the years 1850 to 1890, there were at least 36 sets of brothers who were diocesan priests and 35 sets of uncles and nephews. These statistics include the great levitical families of Cashel, like the Fennellys, Crokes, Mullallys and Cantwells. Archbishop Thomas Fennelly had two brothers priests, two uncles Vicars Apostolic of Madras, India, and an uncle a priest in Cashel diocese. He was a grand-nephew of Dr. John Ryan, the wealthy bishop of Limerick, and was closely related to the Fennellys, the Hickeys and John J. Duan, all of whom ministered in Cashel.³⁵ Thomas Croke's lineage included two grand-uncles, one a bishop and one dean of Cloyne, an uncle who was parish priest of Charleville, two brothers priests and two sisters who were nuns.³⁶ A Cashel family in which clerics spanned three generations was that of James Mullally, who had two nephews, William F. and James, priests of the diocese and they in turn had two nephews, Patrick and William Morris, who served as priests in the diocese. William F. and James also had five sisters who became nuns.³⁷ Dean Walter Cantwell had two nephews priests of Cashel and a grand-nephew, John, who was archbishop of Los Angeles. In addition, he was nephew of Walter Cantwell of Waterford diocese where the Cantwell clerics were just as prominent.³⁸

In the diocese of Waterford and Lismore, working from less comprehensive sources, 16 sets of brothers and 5 sets of uncles and nephews can be counted. In this diocese, the ecclesiastical dynasties included the Powers and the Meanys. Bishop John Power of Waterford had four brothers priests, one of whom died while collecting in the U.S. Pierse Power succeeded his brother as bishop and there were also an uncle a priest and a nephew, Richard Hennebry. The four Meany brothers who were priests could boast of four uncles and two nephews priests and a sister a nun.³⁹

"A host of Walsh mountain priests" is how Ossory historian, William Carrigan, refers to the interconnected families of Nolans, Kellys and Walshes in that diocese.

³⁵ James O'Shea, *op. cit.*, p.334; Skehan, *Priests of Cashel and Emly*, CDA.

³⁶ Skehan, *Priests of Cashel and Emly*, CDA; Mark Tierney, **Croke of Cashel**, (Dublin 1976), pp. 2-4.

³⁷ Diary of James O'Carroll, 9 Feb 1862, CDA; James O'Shea, *op. cit.*, p.346.

³⁸ Skehan, *Priests of Cashel and Emly*, CDA.; James O'Shea, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-9; Matthew Butler on priests, Ms. 9506, NL.

³⁹ Butler, Ms. 9506, NL.

Edward Nolan, parish priest of Gowran who died in 1851, could count among his clerical relatives an uncle, three nephews, four grand-nephews and a grand-niece.⁴⁰ Another prominent levitical family of Ossory was the Birch family. The brothers, Michael and John, had a nephew, two grand-nephews and three cousins who were priests of the diocese.⁴¹ Finally, Edward Aylward, P.P. Castlecomer 1804 -1865, had three uncles priests of Ossory, a brother a Christian Brother, two sisters and an aunt who were nuns.⁴² In his biographical sketches, Carrigan mentions 11 sets of brothers and 14 sets of uncle and nephew.

Levitical families were a feature of all dioceses. Paul Cullen of Dublin was surrounded on all sides by priests and nuns. His uncle was Fr. James Maher of Carlow, while Patrick F. Moran, bishop of Ossory and later archbishop of Sydney, was his nephew and there were twenty nuns in the family.⁴³ In the diocese of Tuam, prominent levitical families included the Heaneys, MacHales and MacEvillys. John MacHale, the famous archbishop, had an uncle a priest in Killala diocese while he himself had at least three nephews ministering in Tuam diocese in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁴ MacHale's successor and great rival, John MacEvilly, had an uncle, a brother and three nephews who were priests of the diocese.⁴⁵ In Kilmore diocese, the prominent families were O'Reillys - one family spanning four generations - Bradys of Drumnagar, Corrs, Rogans, Maguires, Finnegans and McHughes.⁴⁶ It should be noted, too, that often there were marriages within these families, sometimes as a direct result of clerical matchmaking,⁴⁷ and so the network of priestly families was extended still further within individual dioceses.

Education and Training

A recurring theme in books written in the nineteenth century by journalists, travellers and those recording their reminiscences was the contrast between priests educated in the continental colleges such as Douai, Paris and St. Omer and priests educated in the home colleges. A typical example is the following passage in a book

⁴⁰ Carrigan, *op. cit.*, p.424; Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p.232.

⁴¹ Carrigan, *op. cit.*, p.477.

⁴² *Ibid.* p.167.

⁴³ Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p.232; Carrigan, *op. cit.*, p.229.

⁴⁴ cf. Monsignor D'Alton, **History of the Archdiocese of Tuam**, (Dublin 1928), Vol. 11.

⁴⁵ cf. Liam Bane, **The Bishop in Politics**, Life and Career of John MacEvilly, (Westport 1993); D'Alton, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Francis J. McKiernan, Kilmore Priests, *Breifne* 1986, p.316.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.316.

in 1880 by Terence McGrath, an English journalist. Referring to a Fr. Morrissey, McGrath writes that Morrissey "entered the College of St. Patrick at Maynooth where, amid five hundred divinity students of the same class, he passed through his classical and theological studies and emerged to enter the priesthood with every prejudice of his boyhood strengthened; profoundly ignorant of the world or its political systems, regarding the Church as the divine source of all human power and himself as the repository of her infallibility". McGrath then continues: "Allocated to a parish whose elderly pastor had been educated at St. Omer in France, he found himself in direct opposition to his parish priest. Fr. Halloran was a placid and gentle old man, endowed with considerable tact and abounding with good will towards all men".⁴⁸

In similar vein, S. M. Hussey, a land agent, writes in his **Reminiscences**: "... I am bound to say that the Roman Catholic priests when I was young were much superior to those of today. They were drawn from a better class, because, having to be educated at Rome or, at least, as far away as St. Omer, entailed some considerable outlay by their relatives. Moreover, they brought back from their continental seminaries broader ideas than can be acquired in purely Irish colleges..." Hussey, then, offers this opinion of Maynooth College: "The greatest curse to the Irish nation has been Maynooth because it has fostered the ordination of peasants' sons. These are uneducated men who have never been out of Ireland, whose sympathies are wholly with the class from which they have sprung, and who are given no training calculated to afford them a broader view than that of the narrowest class prejudice".⁴⁹

Similar sentiments were expressed in books by Henry Inglis, Daniel Madden and Mrs. Houstoun.⁵⁰ These writers can hardly be considered as impartial observers of the scene and one suspects that their resentment stemmed from the fact that the Maynooth men were more likely to involve themselves in politics and political agitation. But, taking account of this basic antipathy, how valid were these observations of lack of training and lack of refinement of those who spent seven years at Maynooth preparing themselves for the Irish mission?

The report of the Royal Commission of 1827 stated that it was the practice of each Roman Catholic bishop to hold an annual meeting in his district for the selection of candidates for Maynooth and other seminaries. These candidates were examined in

⁴⁸ Terence McGrath, **Pictures from Ireland**, (London 1880), p.57, courtesy Dom Mark Tierney, O.S.B.

⁴⁹ S. M. Hussey, *op. cit.*, (London 1904), pp.115-6.

⁵⁰ See H. D. Inglis, **A Journey throughout Ireland during the Spring, Summer and Autumn of 1834**, (London 1838); Daniel Owen Madden, **Ireland and its Rulers since 1829**, 3 parts, (London 1844); Mrs. Houstoun, **Twenty Years in the Wild West**, (London 1879).

Latin and literature and the best qualified were selected to go forward.⁵¹ There were great variations in the quality and quantity of learning which the prospective students had received. The diversity ranged from those who were educated in hedge schools to those who, like Bishop Moriarty of Kerry, had the benefit of private tutors before being sent abroad.⁵² As the century progressed, diocesan colleges or, as they were sometimes known, minor seminaries, were established around the country. This resulted in a much more sophisticated feeder system for Maynooth and the other seminaries and also brought about a parallel improvement in educational standards. Certainly, judging from the standard of letter-writing to be found in the correspondence in the diocesan archives, the priests who emerged at this period were extremely literate men.

Students usually began their seminary training at the age of seventeen or eighteen. They were obliged to sit an entrance examination and they were graded according to their learning and ability.⁵³ If, as happened in rare cases, the student was younger, then he was obliged to repeat the first or second year. The standard course was of seven years' duration, four of which were devoted to the study of theology. In the case of Maynooth, students who excelled in the study of theology were sent by their bishops to pursue further studies at the Dunboyne Establishment. Seminaries followed a pattern and there was scarcely any variation in the courses followed, in the syllabi, text books or the model of education and training which prevailed. The student's life was carefully ordered, with the day in Maynooth commencing at 6 a.m. and including study and classwork, periods of prayer and spiritual exercises, recreation and meals.⁵⁴ The following timetable, dated 1895, taken from Healy's **History of Maynooth College** would have been standard with very little variations for all other Irish seminaries:⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Education Commission Report 1826-27, Maynooth College, op.cit.*, p.58.

⁵² William Maziere Brady papers, Ms. 8608(19), NL.

⁵³ Walter MacDonald, **Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor**, (London 1925), p.31.

⁵⁴ James O'Shea, *op. cit.*, 16-17; Healy, *op. cit.*, pp. 280 ff.

⁵⁵ Healy, *op. cit.*, p. 744.

A.M.		P.M.	
6.30	Rise	12.45	Lunch
6.30-7.30	Meditation and Mass	1.00-1.30	Recreation
7.30-8.30	Study	1.30-2.30	Study
8.30	Breakfast	2.30-3.30	Class
9.00-9.45	Recreation	3.30	Visit to the Blessed Sacrament
9.45-10.45	Class	3.45	Dinner
10.45-11.45	Study	4.15-5.30	Recreation
11.45-12.45	Class	5.30-7.45	Study
		7.45-8.05	Spiritual Reading
		8.05-8.10	Examination of Conscience
		8.10	Supper
		9.00	Night Prayer
		10.00	Lights Out

Theology text-books were in Latin and they were the dull, standard works of the time. The object of the training was to produce efficient, obedient priests, whose primary function was seen as the administration of the sacraments. Certainly, no account was taken of the demands of fundraising and financial management and the accompanying problems which faced so many priests when they were given the responsibility of running parishes. Intellectual adventure was not encouraged, as students were obliged to adhere slavishly to the prescribed texts. The end product was not a questioning, intellectually curious priesthood but rather one where the predominant virtues were obedience and conformity. It is highly significant that, of all complaints registered against priests in the area of discipline, very few, if any, had to do with intellectual dissent. Even the most famous dispute of this period involving the Callan priest, Robert O'Keeffe, who brought legal actions against two bishops, had more to do with personality and attitudinal differences than it had to do with theological dissension.⁵⁶ It would seem that the seminarians accepted the theological propositions offered them in an unquestioning spirit, as they were intended to do. There was no room for debate or dissent and, indeed, it is most likely that, if any student chose to persist in such a line of questioning or offer a contrary opinion, he would certainly have been pronounced as unsuitable and requested to leave.

The Cashel curate, James O'Carroll, who went to Paris to study, having been rejected by Maynooth euphemistically described as *minus habens*, was not impressed by the Maynooth-trained clergy that he subsequently encountered at diocesan conferences. O'Carroll, who had a poor opinion of himself as a student, remarked that the answering of the priests at the first conference he attended made him "think

⁵⁶ Robert O'Keeffe, a priest of Ossory diocese, was curate in Callan parish 1871-75 and P.P. of the same parish from 1883 until his death in 1887. He was involved in a long and bitter dispute, in the course of which he took legal actions against his bishop, Patrick F. Moran and Paul Cullen, archbishop of Dublin.

something more" of himself than ever before and he was of the opinion that those who went smoothly through Maynooth were "quite puerile" at conferences.⁵⁷

The Gaelic League activist, Peadar O Laoghaire, in his autobiography, does not dwell on the years spent training for the priesthood at Maynooth. The biggest impression the college seems to have made on him was that it was a most unhealthy place, especially for students from the rural areas. The food he deemed to be satisfactory, although he was not happy with so much meat, preferring his customary diet of potatoes and vegetables.⁵⁸ As regards his studies in philosophy and theology, these he dismisses with the following perfunctory comments: "The six years which I spent in the College went by and they were all the same, almost. There was no difference between them but in the stages of the work we had to do. Each year had its own stage of work allotted to it - one year advocacy, one year of arts and four years theology".⁵⁹

Much more vocal, however, is Walter MacDonald, who, in his **Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor**, offers some very forthright opinions about his years at Maynooth as student and professor. MacDonald, as is evident from his later career, was a man who possessed an inquisitive and speculative intelligence and he found his lecturers and professors at Maynooth most uninspiring. He entered the college in 1870 and in his first year, he studied Latin, Greek, English, Algebra, Old Testament and Catechism.⁶⁰ In his book, he is critical of his English tutor and of the Old Testament professor, Dr. Whitehead, whose lectures, according to MacDonald, consisted of "hearing three students repeat each a chapter of the Bible, word for word".⁶¹ The discipline in the college during his time he describes as "lax" and he attributes this to "incapacity and inefficiency on the part of the Deans".⁶² This latter comment is rather a strange one and it is certainly not supported by the correspondence on the topic available in diocesan archives.

But it is for the philosophy course and its tutors that MacDonald reserves his most trenchant criticisms. "There must have been something very wrong with the way in which we were taught philosophy", he writes, "seeing that it failed so utterly to interest one like me".⁶³ The professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy, Rev. Richard

⁵⁷ Diary of James O'Carroll, March 1862, CDA.

⁵⁸ Peadar O Laoghaire, *My Story*, (Oxford Univ. Press 1987), trans. Cyril O Ceirin, pp. 69ff.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.78.

⁶⁰ MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p.31.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.33

⁶² *Ibid.* p. 35.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 43.

Hackett, comes in for severe criticism. "His one notion of teaching", MacDonald observes, "was to keep us to a dead grind of some old, traditional statements of doctrine, proofs and answers to objections; all very bald and imperfect - very unlike what one meets in the real world". There was scarcely any reference to John Stuart Mill and the philosophy of Utilitarianism and, likewise, the other prominent philosophers of the time received cursory treatment. "Darwin was then revolutionizing thought", says MacDonald, "but we overturned him in two or three brief sentences. Kant was a name of which we read in a paragraph of our books with Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, all visionaries. Following in the wake of Darwin in England, there was a school of Materialistic or Agnostic thought, captured by Huxley and Spencer; who, however, troubled Mr. Hackett very little. We were educated in a fool's paradise as if we were still in the eighteenth or even the sixteenth century". MacDonald concludes his criticism of the philosophy course with the simple statement: "The truth is that Philosophy was not one of the strong points of our College".⁶⁴

"We were behind our time; slaying foes that had been disabled or killed long ago, and unaware of, or closing our eyes to the new method of attack..."⁶⁵ Clearly, Walter MacDonald was equally unimpressed with the course in dogmatic and moral theology, which lasted for four years. He had an enquiring mind and he was most dissatisfied with the failure of the professors of his time to address the problems then being posed for theologians of all religions, particularly by the advances in scientific thought. "Our strong, childlike faith", he writes, "kept us safe in the Middle Ages; which was well for such of us as could stay there always, but full of danger for any that could not".⁶⁶ MacDonald, who later became professor of Moral Theology and Prefect of the Dunboyne Establishment at Maynooth, ran foul of the conservative Irish hierarchy and the authorities at Rome. It is clear from his book that the censures which were placed on him were rather arbitrary and thoroughly undeserved. He learned that innovative thinking was not welcome, particularly from a professor at the national seminary, and it is not surprising that the treatment he received brought from him the following emphatic statement: "I say now, very solemnly, that the conservatism in which I trained very nearly drove me out of the Church on many occasions, or into a mad-house, and that the good, easy men who, for the honour of God, would, in the interest of religion, insist on these traditional views - making dogmas of what are but school traditions - are tormenting souls and driving them out of the Church".⁶⁷

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 43-44.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 53.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 58.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 75.

Student progress in the various colleges was carefully monitored and bishops relied on annual reports which were sent to them by the college deans. These reports followed a standard form with comments on performance in class, attention to studies and suitability for orders. One such report, from Dr. Browne to Archbishop Walsh of Dublin, gives an indication of the priorities and the student qualities which were considered important. One student is described as "diligent and quiet" and Browne is of the opinion that he will be "docile and sensible". Another student, judged to be the weakest intellectually, is the "most presentable in manner" and again thought to be "attentive and docile". The comment on the student Purcell is interesting in that Browne describes him as "more of the Dublin type of student and priest than the others, and should become in time respectable".⁶⁸ Alumni of Maynooth College, too, had to strive to achieve respectability, that status which was so important to the Victorians.

These exhortations to obedience and docility were well advised, if one is to judge from the guidelines for clerical behaviour offered by Archbishop Slattery of Cashel to a new curate in 1852. The first recommendation to the young priest taking up his first appointment is "always to be regulated by the parish priest". "Due subordination" would always be a requirement and the curate should seek, at all times, to live in harmony with fellow priests. "Your own happiness in this life as well as theirs will depend on this..." the archbishop advised, and allowances must be made for any "waywardness of disposition" and peculiarities of character which he might encounter in others. The failings of fellow priests should never be discussed, especially among the laity, as this would not only offend against charity but would scandalise the hearers. "Be assured", Slattery observed, "they are sharp sighted enough to see our faults without our exposing one another....". The archbishop went on to urge the curate to have as little dealings as possible with the laity outside the discharge of his priestly duties. There was a warning about forming acquaintances in the parish and, in particular, the young priest was urged not to involve himself in the disputes of the laity. Finally, Slattery assured the curate that, if he were to observe these principles, he would enjoy peace of mind and give satisfaction to the prelate whom God had placed over him.⁶⁹

The counsels of perfection enunciated here by Slattery, which seem more appropriate for angels than for humans, do give a very clear idea of the type of finished product which ecclesiastical authorities expected to emerge from the seminaries of the time. The emphasis was on the cultivation of a spirit of unquestioning obedience and

⁶⁸ R. Browne to Walsh, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, 3 March 1890, DDA

⁶⁹ Slattery to Rev. P. Canty, Thurles, 17 May 1852, CDA.

submission to all authority. Anything which might be interpreted as individualism or as demonstrating a creative and independent spirit was to be corrected. All students were obliged to observe a strict set of rules aimed at producing conformity of mind and of attitude, just as they were expected to absorb and reproduce without question the long and detailed Latin tracts which contained the teaching of the Catholic church in dogmatic and moral theology and in sacred scripture.

Occasionally, there were reports which contained complaints about the behaviour of students. Most of them were trivial, such as that against a Cashel student who was cautioned for "keeping his candle lit to a late hour at night".⁷⁰ Sometimes, there were more serious complaints as, for instance, those preferred against Cashel students Laffan, O'Brien, O'Neill and Fahy, who were found one night "in a condition betraying in various degrees excess in drinking". Two of the students had pre-empted any action taken against them by resigning their places. The remaining two, O'Neill and Fahy, were made aware that the occurrence would "very gravely influence the judgment to be formed by the authorities as to their promotion to orders".⁷¹ Similarly, in 1854, a student of Dublin diocese was excluded from orders because he was found drunk in his room on Good Friday and he was also accused of being "a leader in some grave disciplinary disorders that occurred in the College" the previous year.⁷² Such complaints were rare, however, and the bulk of the reports are as predictable as they are uninteresting.

While on vacation, the students were under observation and the parochial clergy were encouraged to report on clerical students in their districts. Thus, in 1894, William Donegan, a curate in Lucan, reported to Archbishop Walsh on a student living in that area. The student's mother owned two public houses, one in Saggart and one at the Twelfth Lock. The student, who had received the minor order of tonsure, was serving drink at the bar to "no less than thirty two people" and, according to the informant, was known locally as "Father Matt of the bar". He wore his clerical uniform and all knew that he was a candidate for the priesthood. In addition, the student was accused of smoking in public "with very common men, who seem already to openly disavow all regard for religion". Also, the vigilante reported, "to the amazement of Protestants as well as Catholics, he has been seen, not only cycling with young women, but helping them to mount and dismount while in his ecclesiastical attire".⁷³

⁷⁰ Reports 1858-9, CDA.

⁷¹ C.W. Russell to Leahy, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, 26 Dec 1870, CDA.

⁷² W. M. Lee to Cullen, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, 5 Feb 1854, DDA.

⁷³ William S. Donegan to Walsh, St. Mary's, Lucan, 28 July 1898, DDA.

Obviously responding to a request from the archbishop to investigate the matter further, James Baxter, a priest at Clondalkin, interviewed the student. Baxter reported that the student had indeed attended at the bar at the Twelfth Lock while his brother was away on business but that, "considering the remoteness of the place and the circumstances", he did not think it any harm. As regards the cycling trips, the student stated that he had met three young women from the neighbourhood in the park and that he had ridden home with them and with one of them on another occasion. The student assured his inquisitor that "nothing bordering even on impropriety ever occurred". The charge of "associating with persons of low character" was denied. So, Baxter concluded, "If he has been wanting in clerical decorum or apparent levity in the past, I am sure he will be more guarded in the future and his delinquencies I think might be attributed more to want of prudence than to malice or evil intent".⁷⁴

Not so fortunate was Robert O'Neill, a student from Athy who had transferred from Clonliffe College to Maynooth to pursue his studies for Dublin diocese. His behaviour while on vacation was described by the parish priest, Andrew Quinn, in January 1871, as "uniformly unsatisfactory". The P.P. added that people in the town who knew O'Neill had expressed "amazement and apprehension" at the idea of his being promoted to orders. Quinn was not able to offer specific instances but he still felt that he could not conscientiously recommend O'Neill for ordination.⁷⁵ In another letter which followed shortly, Quinn told Cardinal Cullen that he would encourage O'Neill to give up all thoughts of the priesthood.⁷⁶ Clearly, the Cardinal acted on the parish priest's advice as, some days later, O'Neill wrote to Cullen, expressing his intense disappointment at being rejected for orders. He stated that he was "not endowed with great abilities" but he believed, as did the authorities in Maynooth, that his abilities were such "as would with application suffice" for the office to which he had been aspiring. He was convinced that he would never be happy in the world and he pleaded with Cullen to grant him an *exeat* and to heed the appeal "of a heart-broken and desolate boy".⁷⁷ It is unlikely that Cullen acceded to such a request as it was not a time when there was any scarcity of candidates.

It is when considered against this background of strict discipline, rigid enforcement of rules and imposition of harsh penalties that the so called "students' revolt" at St. Patrick's College, Thurles in November 1860 seems all the more astonishing. The outbreak in the college came about as a direct result of the economies

⁷⁴ James Baxter to Walsh, Clondalkin, Co. Dublin, 19 Aug 1898, DDA.

⁷⁵ Andrew Quinn to Dr. Moran, Athy, 27 Jan 1871, DDA.

⁷⁶ Andrew Quinn to Cullen, Athy, 29 Jan 1871, DDA.

⁷⁷ Robert O'Neill to Cullen, 53 Thomas St., Dublin, 30 Jan [1871], DDA.

introduced by Edmond Ryan, who was appointed president in 1855. Interestingly, before studying for the priesthood, Ryan had studied at Trinity College, Dublin, where he had obtained admission through the patronage of the local landlord, Lord Clare.⁷⁸ According to Cashel diarist James O'Carroll, Ryan had a greater aptitude for farming than for "professing in class" and was "better adapted to manage a dairy of 70 cows than to preside over a college of 70 students". The new president established a dairy on the land attached to the college but, at the same time, he attempted to effect savings by cutting back on the food allowance for staff and students. The quality of the food deteriorated seriously and the students made representations to the bishop, Patrick Leahy, from time to time but to no avail. Finally, on the morning of the 26 November, the students assembled and they decided not to eat the bread that was offered them at breakfast. They also swore to stand by one another and not to divulge the names of those who were the leaders of the protest. The students then left the college and they marched to the bishop's palace. When the bishop refused to meet them, the students returned to the college and shortly afterwards, having taken the decision to go home, they returned to Thurles, where they breakfasted in the hotels and houses of the town. All left the college, except one student named O'Riordan, who was a nephew of the president. Two returned to the college and one of those, Joseph Laffan, according to O'Carroll, divulged the names of the leaders to the authorities in order to save himself. Many of those involved in the revolt did not return and others entered colleges for the foreign missions. A number did return to the college, but they had to undergo a searching examination by the bishop as to their part in the revolt. Laffan was sent to Maynooth in September 1861 and O'Riordan to Paris. This, according to O'Carroll, was an example of "how low cunning and treachery have so far succeeded".⁷⁹

The student revolt was a source of embarrassment to the bishop who had appointed Edmond Ryan in the first instance and he took steps to ensure that there would be no recurrence. James O'Carroll's brother, Thomas, was appointed president with instructions to keep strict surveillance over the students. He was specifically instructed by the bishop to exclude any young man whose family was involved in faction fighting or in which there was evidence of immorality. Each parish priest was obliged to examine the status of the family and report to the bishop before the proposed candidate would be accepted at Thurles.⁸⁰ The protest of 1860 was such an unusual occurrence that it lived on in the folklore of Cashel clergy and, if one is to judge from

⁷⁸ Walter Skehan, *Priests of Cashel and Emly*, CDA.

⁷⁹ Diary of James O'Carroll, Sept 1862, CDA.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, CDA.

O'Carroll, those of the protesting students who were later ordained for the diocese had to live with the consequences of the stand they had taken at the time.

A similar, though much less dramatic, protest at Maynooth college over the quality of the food is recorded in MacDonald's reminiscences. In this case, it took the form of loud shouting and chanting in the students' refectory and as a result, five or six students were identified as ringleaders and expelled. A number of other students subscribed to a testimonial fund for those who were punished. MacDonald, who was at that time a senior monitor in the college, addressed the meeting and was the first to sign his name to the list of subscribers. He was informed later that he was very fortunate to escape without a grave admonition.⁸¹

As regards pastimes, reading was popular with the students. According to MacDonald, the college library was poor and uninteresting. Of the books which circulated freely among the student body, the most common were books of poetry, history and essays. He speaks of reading Scott's poems privately and some volumes of Dickens, with whom he had not been acquainted before that.⁸² The game of handball was played all year round and cricket in the summertime. Football and hurling were not allowed and MacDonald describes how, on two occasions, attempts were made by the students to introduce football. On the second occasion, the ball was confiscated and football forbidden on the grounds that it was an innovation - "a dangerous one too".⁸³ There was a short vacation of ten days after Christmas when all the students, except those from Dublin and Meath, had to remain at the college.⁸⁴ All the students were allowed home for the longer summer vacation.

Presumably the object of the training programme at the seminaries was to equip the young cleric to undertake the various, and often varied, duties of the diocesan curate. These duties are described by the bishop of Elphin, Laurence Gillooly, in a letter to Patrick Kelly, a curate in the mensal parish of Oran. As with the advice proffered by Archbishop Slattery referred to above, emphasis was placed on the importance of the underlying obligation of obedience together with a willingness to carry out whatever tasks the parish priest might allocate to him. The curate would be expected to celebrate mass daily and twice on Sunday. He was obliged to give instruction at Sunday masses. He had to say mass at station houses as directed by the parish priest and to hear confessions at the appointed times. He was responsible for

⁸¹ MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁸² *Ibid.* pp. 38, 65.

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 67.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 49.

organising Christian doctrine confraternities in the chapels and classes for first confession and confirmation. He was expected to visit the schools in the parish on a regular basis and to instruct the children in the catechism. He was to co-operate with the parish priest in establishing new schools. Another important duty was attendance at sick calls which were organised in conjunction with the parish priest. There were other miscellaneous duties such as organising religious societies and the collection of funds for new schools, churches and parochial residences.⁸⁵

How suitable the courses followed at Maynooth and the other seminaries were for subsequent life on the mission is a debatable point. It is doubtful, for a start, if it could have prepared them for the lonely life which many would later lead, particularly in remote rural areas. MacDonald speaks of the loneliness which he felt on his first appointment to a teaching post at St. Kieran's College, Kilkenny and how he missed the companionship of his college friends.⁸⁶ If MacDonald experienced such feelings in his post as college tutor, one can imagine the extreme isolation and the loneliness of those who had to minister in the more remote rural parishes of Ireland, particularly in the winter months when access was difficult and the mode of transport was by horseback. The newly appointed curates must have questioned, too, the relevance of many of the heavy Latin textbooks which they were obliged to study and the long and tedious tracts in which the pros and cons of complex and often obscure theological and philosophical points had been discussed at length. It was unlikely that they would be obliged to defend these propositions in after life, or to encounter many parishioners who would be familiar with the abstruse arguments propounded in such treatises as Perrone's *Praelectiones* or *Juris Canonici Theoria et Praxis*. But it was not a case of training men who would have to establish their title, to convince and persuade congregations or to defend their positions. For the ecclesiastical students of the time, their future prospects and their status were well secured in the Irish society in which they were to minister as diocesan priests.

⁸⁵ Gillooly to Patrick Kelly, Tuam, 12 Aug 1858, EDA.

⁸⁶ MacDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-9.

Chapter Two

PARISH PRIESTS AND CURATES

In a letter to his archbishop, William Walsh, dated 7 November 1893, James Leahy, the parish priest of Sandyford in Dublin diocese, wrote to complain about the appointment to that parish of a curate whom Leahy considered most unsuitable. The P.P. complained that it was impossible to manage "this wild and extensive" parish with an assistant who had the reputation of always being at war with his superiors. Leahy then wrote: "Unless we PP's and CC's live in peace and harmony, no good can be accomplished and our lives [made] intolerable".¹

For the most part, it would appear that harmony did prevail or, at least, if there was friction between priests, it was not sufficiently serious to merit the intervention of superiors. In the various diocesan archives, however, there are letters of complaints and records of some very bitter disputes in nineteenth century presbyteries. In the Dublin diocesan archives, which houses by far the fullest and most complete collection of letters and documents, there are details of 32 different disputes between priests. This amounts to quite a volume of correspondence, since individual disputes, particularly the more acrimonious ones, meant numerous exchanges of letters between priests and their superiors. Sometimes, the more protracted disputes could continue over a number of years. In the archives of Cashel, Elphin, Armagh and Ardagh, which have material only for certain periods of time, 35 serious disputes are recorded. Of this number, Armagh diocese, which had a particularly boisterous set of clergymen, accounts for 13 disputes over the years 1853-65. It should be noted here, too, that these figures do not take account of the disruption and disagreements caused in parishes by priests with alcohol problems, as this is discussed in a separate chapter.² On the assumption, then, that only when there was serious disharmony and acrimony in a presbytery did it come to the notice of the bishop, one must conclude that most priests managed to work out a tolerable mode of co-existence.

¹J. Leahy P.P. to Walsh, 7 Nov 1893, DDA.

² cf. Chapter 7, Problems of Discipline - Alcohol.

Before proceeding to an examination of the nature and causes of disputes, it is necessary to look at the numbers of secular priests in the ministry over the century and in particular, the balance between parish priests and curates.

Table 3

Overall number of Catholic secular priests 1800-1900³

	Bishops	Parish Priests	Curates	Total
1800	26	986	628	1640
1835	27	993	1166	2186
1851	29	1014	1354	2397
1881	27	996	1745	2768
1901	29	1022	1916	2938

This table shows that the total number of diocesan clergy increased by 1298 or 79% over the century and by 541 or 23% over the second half of the century. By century's end, the Catholic population of Ireland was very well serviced, because as the numbers of clergy increased, there was a significant decrease in population. Consequently, there was a dramatic improvement in the ratio of priest to people, one priest to 2,676 Catholics in 1800 compared with one priest to 2,214 Catholics in 1851 and one priest to 1,126 Catholics at the end of the century.⁴

It should be noted that this increase in the number of priests was not uniform in all dioceses across the country. There was little or no change in dioceses like Ardagh, Kerry, Ossory and Waterford, while numbers actually decreased marginally in dioceses like Tuam and the combined dioceses of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. The more significant increases occurred in dioceses which included the larger cities. The total number of the Dublin diocesan clergy increased from 184 in 1850 to 288 in 1900, an increase of 57%; in Down and Connor, which includes Belfast city, there was a staggering increase from 61 to 147 (141%) and in Cork diocese there was an increase of 36 priests or 46%. These increases in clerical manpower were necessitated by the growth in the Catholic population of these cities over the half century. In particular, there was a huge growth in the numbers of Catholics in Belfast, where the numbers

³ The figures are taken from Hoppen, *op. cit.*, Table 31, p. 171.

⁴ *Ibid.*

increased from 41,406 in 1861 to 84,992 in 1901.⁵ While there was a significant growth in the number of priests in urban areas, care must be exercised in drawing conclusions for other areas. While there was little or no increase in areas which suffered most from emigration, such as the western dioceses, there was an increase in the diocese of Raphoe, where numbers went from 53 priests in 1850 to 78 in 1900 and in Killaloe, which had 117 priests in 1850 and 144 in 1900.⁶ These latter dioceses may have been considered to be understaffed and if this were so, there was a need to improve the ratio of priests to people.

An increase in the total number of priests meant in reality an increase in the number of curates, as the number of bishops and parish priests increased very little. In the first half of the century, the number of curates expanded dramatically, from 628 in 1800 to 1354 in 1851 - an increase of 726 or 116% - and in the second half of the century, the increase was 562 or 42%. There was very little change in the number of parishes in dioceses over those years, except in the city areas where it was necessary to create new parishes. This, taken with the growth in the number of curates, meant that the prospect of promotion to parish priest was delayed. In a study of 40 Co. Tipperary priests carried out by O'Shea, it emerges that the average age of promotion over the years 1850-1891 was 48 years of age and the average number of years in the ministry before receiving promotion was 20 years. The one who was longest in waiting, the 'head waiter', was Timothy O'Connell who was 29 years in the priesthood before being promoted and the youngest to succeed was John Ryan, who became a parish priest at the exceptionally tender age of 32.⁷ In the diocese of Ossory, priests could expect to wait 23 years on average before being promoted from curate to parish priest and the average age on promotion was 51 years. Edward Rowan had to wait 35 years before becoming parish priest of Tullaherin at the age of 59, while the head waiter was Edward O'Farrell who was aged 67 and had waited 39 years for promotion to the parish of Danesfort. The youngest parish priests were Edward Aylward, appointed to Castlecomer at the age of 43 and Philip Darcy who became parish priest of Hugginstown at the age of 40. Darcy was something of a phenomemon in that he entered Maynooth College at the age of 16 and was ordained in 1828 at the unusually young age of 21.⁸ It should be pointed out here that generally promotion was granted in order of seniority but bishops were not obliged to adhere strictly to this system. The

⁵ Census of Ireland 1861, Census of Ireland 1901.

⁶ Irish Catholic Directory 1850, 1900.

⁷ O'Shea, *op. cit.*, Table 3, p. 313.

⁸ These statistics are based on information taken from William Carrigan's **History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory**, *op. cit.*, (Dublin 1905).

bishop of a diocese had the final say on who was promoted, when and to what parish. Sometimes, priests who had displeased their superiors could be made to wait while the system also left bishops open to the charge of promoting favourites, particularly in the choice of parish.

A survey of 50 parish priests in the Dublin diocese reveals a similar pattern. Here again, the average length of time that a curate could expect to serve before being promoted was 23 years. Two priests, John O'Rourke and James Walsh, had to wait 29 years while two others, Thomas O'Dwyer and Richard Galvin, gained promotion after serving only 10 years in the ministry.⁹

Not only, then, was there an increase in the numbers of curates but, because of the growing promotion blockage, there was an increase in the number of older, or senior, curates. This difficulty was exacerbated by the absence of any regulations governing the retirement of parish priests. There was no stated age at which parish priests were obliged to retire and this sometimes meant that parish priests remained in office, although patently unfit to carry out their duties properly through ill health or senility. This added to the frustrations felt by curates but increased numbers meant that 'curate power' was growing and bishops now had to pay serious attention to their just grievances, particularly in matters relating to their *modus vivendi*, such as income, living standards and accommodation.

The causes of rows and disagreements were many but they can be divided into three broad categories. There were, first of all, the disputes which arose when two men who did not agree were forced to share the same residence and expected to co-exist peacefully. This situation was often exacerbated by the presence in the presbytery of a servant who was hostile towards one priest or by the presence of one or more members of the family of one of the priests. Secondly, there were disputes that arose from what may be described as personality differences, when priests who worked together but did not necessarily share the one residence, had ongoing arguments and disagreements. The causes of these disputes, which seem at times to be trivial and even downright silly, could nevertheless give rise to the bitterest and most acrimonious of disputes. Often, in these cases, the underlying disagreement manifested itself in charges of neglect of duty being preferred by one of the parties and where this happened, it was

⁹ William M. O'Riordan, Succession Lists of Parish Priests in the Archdiocese of Dublin 1771-1964, *Reportorium Novum*, 1959-1964.

frequently a way of giving expression to the fundamental personal antagonism which existed between the two priests.

The third and by far the most common cause of dissension was disagreement about parish finances and, specifically, the collection and division of parochial revenue. For instance, of the 32 disputes which are documented in the Dublin archives, 15 are concerned with finance, 4 have to do with problems of shared accommodation while 13 are due to other causes, including charges of neglect of duty and personality and attitudinal differences. To ascertain the causes and the issues involved in these financial disputes, it is necessary to examine more closely some of the individual disputes that are documented.

Disagreements about finance.

In the period before 1850, the method of dividing parish revenue was a pretty haphazard affair and for curates, in particular, it could be most unsatisfactory, as the amount of income made available to them was dependent very much on the goodwill of the individual parish priest. Where this goodwill was lacking, curates were often struggling to exist.¹⁰ The Synod of Thurles in 1850 marked a determined effort to come to terms with this problem by laying down specific regulations governing the division of parochial revenue.¹¹ In general, in a parish with one curate, the parish priest was to receive two thirds of divisible dues (and these too were defined), while the curate was to receive one third -*tertia pars*; in a parish with two curates, the parish priest was to receive one half and the curates one quarter each; in a parish with three curates, the parish priest's entitlement was two fifths of dues and the curates one fifth each. Priests were also in receipt of loads of hay and oats from parishioners. As the century progressed, this was more commonly raised as a levy of money on each household -known as the 'oats money' - and the division of the oats and hay and of the oats money was often a cause of dissension.

Some parish priests were reluctant to adhere to these regulations and bishops were obliged to intervene from time to time to ensure that the dues were divided appropriately. It could happen that a parish priest simply refused to pay a curate the amount to which he was entitled or a P.P. might not make a full and accurate

¹⁰ cf. Peadar Livingstone, *The Monaghan Story*, (Enniskillen 1980), pp. 242 ff.; Patrick J. Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience*, (Dublin 1985), p. 158.

¹¹ *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae apud Thurles*, MDCCCL.

declaration of the total amount of divisible dues in a parish. One curate, Matt Kearney of Tullyallen in Armagh diocese, felt so aggrieved that he made an appeal to his former archbishop, Paul Cullen, who had moved to Dublin. Kearney, writing in May 1852, claimed that, despite an agreement arrived at through arbitration according to which he was to receive £20 a year, he had received only £6 in that particular year.¹² Cullen, leading a national campaign of ecclesiastical reform, would surely have been most reluctant to interfere in the problems of another diocese, as he had problems aplenty in his own diocese of Dublin. Gregory Lynch, a curate in Westland Row parish, complained in 1853 that money from a collection was to be withheld and that this would be the third collection of which the curates had been deprived since the beginning of the year. The reason given was that the P.P., Dr. Meyler, was using the money to pay taxes, although it had been agreed that this should come from another fund. Meyler's defence was that he did not have the funds but Lynch countered with the assertion that the balance for the last three years had been £360.¹³

Another Lynch, James, a curate at Celbridge, alleged that he was not receiving the statutory *tertia pars* or one third of the collection to which he was entitled, since he lived apart from the parish priest. He had received one third for the first five months, if accurate returns had been made - something which the curate doubted - but for the last sixteen months, regardless of the amount of the collections, he had been in receipt of the uniform sum of ten shillings a week. According to his calculations, he was now owed £40.¹⁴

Armagh diocese in the 1850's had some difficult clergymen and inevitably there were disputes about the collection and division of dues. Patrick Slane, the curate at Beragh, was annoyed with his P.P. and made this known to the parishioners. When reprimanded by Archbishop Dixon, Slane defended the statement he had made to the congregation, saying that he had simply told the people about his entitlements. He told the people that two years previously, the collection had been divided three ways; the year before, the P.P., Hugh Murphy, had received all the oats money and, in the present year, according to diocesan regulations, the curates were to receive a fifth part. "I was never much good at collecting money", said the curate, denying that he had insulted or made any personal allusions to Murphy. He hoped that he would not be condemned without first getting a hearing. He was prepared to stand over what he had said and, if found guilty, he was willing "to be transported beyond the seas". In the

¹² Matt Kearney to Cullen, Tullyallen, 31 May 1852, DDA.

¹³ Gregory Lynch to Cullen, Presbytery, Westland Row, 26 Jan 1853, DDA.

¹⁴ James Lynch to Cullen, Celbridge, 2 May 1854, DDA.

curate's opinion, Murphy was the cause of all the trouble and he instanced the case when Murphy told the people that they dare not attend a funeral without paying offerings. The curate wished that his parish priest had "a little more prudence and moderation in his language and manner of acting", and then added, "I do be ashamed of his expressions both in public and private as a parish priest". "My Lord, he would sacrifice every principle for money", Slane said of his parish priest. Again the curate insisted that he had done no wrong, that a P.P. was not "any more infallible" than a curate and if it were shown that he (Slane) had lied, then he was prepared to give public satisfaction.¹⁵

Sometimes, disputes dragged on, especially when parish priests refused to come to terms with their subordinates or, having made commitments, still refused to pay the monies due. A case in point was that involving Thomas Magee, P.P. of Dunleer and his curate, James Hughes. Magee had agreed to pay the £30 owed to Hughes in two instalments of £15 and he had also agreed that Hughes should have the *tertia pars*. The P.P. declared that he was prepared to pay the *tertia pars* but Michael Kieran, the vicar general, who was responsible for negotiating the agreement, felt that, since there were likely to be disagreements at every settlement of dues, it would be better if Hughes were to receive a fixed payment each year rather than the *tertia pars*. Magee was prepared to give Hughes £15 a year and if Hughes could be persuaded to accept this sum, then Kieran thought that there would be "less angry collisions between himself and Mr. Magee and less disedification given to the people". Kieran then observed that the grant of the *tertia pars* would still not improve matters in Dunleer, making the point that, even if there were no financial problems, the two priests would probably still be at loggerheads.¹⁶

Despite Magee's promises, five months later he still had not paid his curate the money due and the reasons he put forward were that Hughes was absent from the parish whenever he pleased and that he frequently neglected his duties. Magee claimed too that Hughes had collected oats in the parish before the P.P. himself - "what was never done in the parish of Dunleer by a curate" - and that he had been at a loss of 26 barrels as a result. If these matters were put right, Magee declared that he was prepared to carry out the agreement previously entered into. He expressed his surprise that the archbishop would allow Hughes to remain in the parish, requesting that he be removed and another curate sent in his place.¹⁷

¹⁵ Patrick Slane to Dixon, Beragh, 11 Oct 1853, ArmDA.

¹⁶ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 8 Jan 1857, ArmDA.

¹⁷ Thomas Magee to Kieran, Moormount, 4 May 1857, ArmDA.

Kieran was clearly disappointed that Magee had not made the promised payments to his curate. He duly reported to the archbishop, saying that he was hopeful that the parish priest would now yield when he received from the archbishop "such a letter of remonstrance" as the case required. He had pointed out to Magee that he could not entertain the charges made against the curate unless they were put in proper form and backed up with the necessary evidence.¹⁸

Of course, in a case such as this there were other matters at issue besides the overt agenda of the curate's financial entitlements. In financial disputes, other questions were raised such as the P.P.'s attitude to money, the curate's attitude to money and the personal antagonism that might exist between the two. The converse of the Magee-Hughes case was that of Henry McKee, a curate who complained about the inactivity of his parish priest. McKee was stationed at Loughgall, an area where, according to McKee, proseletyzers were active. McKee felt that the P.P., Rogers, was not as zealous as he should be and although Rogers had been "studiously kind" to him, there would never be the same friendly relationship that McKee had enjoyed with his previous P.P. In the next sentence, however, McKee indicated that matters were not well by referring to Rogers' "selfish views". He could not understand how a P.P. could expect revenue if he only assisted at stations and Sunday masses and funerals. He also objected strongly to the method of collecting, which involved the curate going from house to house and which was "rather painful to a sensitive curate".¹⁹

Some parishes did hold what was designated a 'curate's collection' and this collection, too, was subject to the same regulations governing the division of parochial revenue. Sometimes curates, who felt badly treated financially, tried to introduce such a collection. This led to open conflict in 1858 in Cookstown parish, where the P.P., James McKenna, claimed the sole right of making a yearly collection in the parish. The previous curate had abided by this regulation but the recent appointment, John Gallogly, had announced to the people that he would be taking up a collection for himself, as he was "in a state of want and destitution". McKenna denied the curate's assertion, saying that he knew that Gallogly had £10 or £12 of harvest dues just then. "His claims on the people are neither just nor seasonable as he puts them forward at this very time when I am in the very act of making my collection", the P.P. complained, thereby giving expression to his real difficulty with Gallogly's collection.²⁰ The

¹⁸ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 6 May 1857, ArmDA.

¹⁹ Henry McKee to Dixon, Loughgall, 15 June 1858, ArmDA.

²⁰ James McKenna to Dixon, Gortacar, Cookstown, 9 Oct 1858, ArmDA.

situation in Cookstown was further aggravated by Gallogly's problems with alcohol, for which he was suspended later when curate at Tullyallen.²¹

The impression that the collection of monies played an important part in the lives of the priests is certainly reinforced in reading these letters. As in the case of Gallogly above, some curates who felt that they were not being paid their proper dues took the initiative and attempted to organise their own financial affairs. In the parish of Carrickmore in 1857, this led to a bitter dispute between two of the curates, Malone and Grogan. It would appear that the income of the two curates was not on a par, as Grogan was claiming one eighth of Malone's collection. In Malone's view, this was unjust as he was partly charged with the running of the whole parish, "often obliged to start off in the darkness of the night several miles" for which the people had recompensed him in oats. He declared that the other curate Grogan was "clutching" the reward of Malone's hard labour and "partly grudging it". "While I was suffering earning this", Malone wrote, " he was at some other vocation useful to himself". He stated too that Grogan had appealed publicly to the people, that he had received about £40 already and that he had sent out collectors to different townlands and raised a further £30. This, Malone felt, was double the amount that he himself had received in his collection. Malone was not happy either with the performance of parish priest, Patrick Vincent, who, he felt, was not fit to do duty and should be substituted in accordance with the regulations of the Council of Trent. The dissatisfied Malone was also displeased that Vincent seemed to entrust Grogan with the care of the parish and he claimed that the people were unwilling to confess to Grogan or ask him to attend sick calls, "he being a relative and acquaintance also of the parishioners". The extent of the bitterness and antagonism that existed between the two curates is evident from Malone's personal abuse of his colleague. He stated that Grogan's father was "an old tailor" who had attended the local rector, that his brother was an undertaker at the Omagh asylum and Grogan himself he described as " a beggar the many years throughout the parish".²²

In Dublin, Paul Smithwick, P.P. of Baldoyle, wrote to the V.G. to complain of a curate organising his own collection and he spoke of the "disedifying situation" of having two priests in the parish in a "state of complete antagonism".²³ In Raphoe diocese, parish priest Thomas Diver told his bishop that his curate was ill and that,

²¹ Joseph Dixon to Gallogly, Drogheda, 4 Mar 1861, (copy), ArmDA.

²² Anthony Malone to Dixon, Carrickmore, 4 May 1857, ArmDA.

²³ P. Smithwick P.P. to Cullen, Baldoyle, 10 Feb 1860, DDA.

since he (Diver) had to fulfill all the duties of the parish himself, he could not "admit the claims of another to a division of the emoluments".²⁴

The problems that curates were experiencing in regard to their entitlement to the *tertia pars* persisted into the 1860's. In April 1860, M.A. Supple, a curate at Donabate in Dublin, was writing to Cullen staking his claim to one third of the £10 paid annually by two landlords to the parish priest. Supple had applied unsuccessfully to the P.P., although he said that it had always been paid to his predecessor, John O'Brien.²⁵ The P.P., John McCarthy, dealt with the complaint in the most abrupt and summary manner, saying that he had given O'Brien his portion "not through any obligation", and that as soon as he had discovered that O'Brien was no longer in need of it, he had stopped giving it to him, "thinking that charity began at home".²⁶

The curate at Collon, Co. Louth, complained in 1861 that, although he was expected to attend all the sick calls, he had not "even the privilege of a horse to carry me over the roadside of a wet country". The P.P. would neither allow him the support of a horse nor give him the use of his own. Now the horseless curate was asking in desperation how he was expected to live there.²⁷

James McDevitt, bishop of Raphoe, was obliged to intervene in a dispute in 1873 between parish priest and curate in the parish of Kilmacrenan. It would seem that, in this instance, the curate, Thomas McKay, had interpreted literally the so called 'curate's collection' and had refused to share it with the parish priest, Michael McBride. The bishop instructed McKay to hand over two thirds of the collection. He also wrote to McBride, informing him of the instruction given to the curate and assuring him that it was his intention to see that the statutes of the diocese were strictly enforced.²⁸

The reforming bishop of Elphin diocese, Laurence Gillooly, was experiencing difficulties in arranging the payment of a just salary to curates. Patrick Maguire, parish priest of Castleblakeney, was offended at the bishop's suggestion that he had assumed the power of fixing the curate's salary. In his rather circuitous style, Maguire said he would agree to pay a certain amount of salary to which he would expect the bishop's unhesitating consent - one can readily understand how the bishop arrived at the

²⁴ Thomas Diver to McDevitt, Bardhill, Dunfanaghy, 11 March 1873, RDA.

²⁵ M.A. Supple to Cullen, Donabate, 12 April 1860, DDA.

²⁶ J. McCarthy to Cullen, Donabate, 21 April 1860, DDA.

²⁷ J. Hardy C.C. to Dixon, Collon, 16 Feb 1861, ArmDA.

²⁸ James McDevitt to McBride, Letterkenny, 27 March 1873 (copy); McDevitt to McKay, Letterkenny, 27 March 1873 (copy) RDA.

conclusion that Maguire was deciding the curate's salary. Furthermore, Maguire was assuming the right to the dues on certain feast days and he was sure that the power of the bishop in these matters was "not unlimited". The bishop had obviously made the payment of dues to the curate compulsory with the threat of penalty on failure to comply. Maguire, however, was not at all disturbed by this, remarking simply, "I shall '*transeat*' for the present its obligatory character on me under the circumstances". He was quite insistent on his rights, stating that he would not allow them to be "frittered away". A man of set opinions, he told the bishop in this same letter that he was refusing grazing rights for a cow to Rev. Mr. Morahan at Ahascragh church on the grounds that he would not allow him to be a burden on the parish. The fact that Morahan was in poor health cut no ice with the inflexible parish priest - "He never spent any time on the mission here nor did he lose his health here" was his comment. Then, ending the letter with an ironic twist, Maguire reciprocated "those kind feelings" which the bishop had expressed towards him.²⁹

In the same diocese and in a similar petty vein, Michael Egan, C.C. Athleague, refused to pay any share of the expenses for a dinner given to priests at a conference. His argument was that it was most unusual and "unheard of in the diocese" for a curate to share such expenses "which the P.P. might avoid if he would choose to be odd". Odd is a particularly appropriate word as the amount in question was £1.7s.³⁰

One of the real difficulties facing curates was that they had little, if any, rights while the *parochus*, or parish priest, had very clearly defined rights, which made him a virtual dictator in his own territory. Certainly, some P.P.'s felt perfectly free to change arrangements at will. This is clear from a letter of Patrick Smith, a curate in the Dublin parish of Newtownmountkennedy, who complained that the P.P. had agreed to pay his two curates £12.10s. from the collection taken at the convent chapel. At the end of the year, the P.P. simply refused to abide by his own arrangement. He even admitted having made the agreement but simply stated that he had changed his mind.³¹

James Whittle, P.P. Dunlavin, was equally adamant. As he saw it, his curates were giving him "a good deal of trouble" about a collection and he was sure they "contemplated grabbing it" if they could. "Until Your Eminence commands me to give it as dues", he told Cullen categorically, "I will not do so". According to Whittle, the curates were in no need of money, having far more in dues than they ever spent and "in

²⁹ Patrick Maguire to Gillooly, Caltra, Castleblakeney, 21 Dec 1860, EDA.

³⁰ Michael Egan to Gillooly, Athleague, 31 Aug 1868, EDA.

³¹ P. Smith to Cullen, Newtownmountkennedy, 10 Oct 1864, DDA.

temporal things besides", he continued, they made themselves very comfortable by asking whatever they wanted. In some instances, the P.P. alleged, the curates had made themselves very troublesome to the people, who had complained that one curate was helping the other in their quest for money. Then, and again this may be the real cause of complaint, the P.P. ended by saying that he had suffered very much from "these gentlemen in consequence of other statements made to my superiors by me".³²

Archbishop Paul Cullen cannot have been very pleased about some of the matters relating to finance, that appear so trivial, which were brought to his notice and on which he was expected to adjudicate. Generally, when this happened, it was an indication of the existence of a state of hostility between parish priest and curate, as a result of which the smallest matters were referred to the bishop because the priests were incapable of arriving at an amicable solution among themselves. This degree of antagonism is evident in letters such as that of William Dunphy, C.C. Ferrybank, Arklow, who, writing in November 1876, pointed to difficulties regarding the division of oats and hay money. The custom in the parish had been that each priest would keep an account of the number of loads of hay he received from the people. Then, on the day of settlement, the P.P. took half of the total number of loads at a fixed rate of 10s. per load. The P.P., Matthew Collier, had refused to accept the money offered by the curate because of the increased price of hay that year. The P.P. was now asking that the loads of hay due to him be brought over to his house at Avoca. "I leave it to Your Eminence", Dunphy declared, "to see how unseemly it must be to have the hay that is now three months in my possession and secured for the winter pulled down and carried out on the street before the public and then filled on cars for transmission to Avoca". The curate apologised for having to write such a letter but he felt that, as Collier had appealed to the Cardinal, he had no other option but to state his case.³³

Intractable Parish Priests

Some parish priests were so difficult and so unwilling to pay their curates their just share that it required a strong, determined and persistent bishop to ensure that justice was done. But even then, there were parish priests who were prepared to defy their superiors and even as strongwilled an administrator as Paul Cullen found it frustrating when faced with parish priests who prevaricated and delayed and employed

³² James Whittle to Cullen, Dunlavin, 2 Dec 1867, DDA.

³³ William Dunphy to Cullen, Ferrybank, Arklow, 3 Nov 1876, DDA.

every tactic to deny the curates their financial entitlements. During Cullen's reign, the P.P. who figures most prominently in the matter of financial disputes with curates is Patrick Mooney of St. Audeon's on the High Street. It seemed that no matter who the curate was or what his temperament and disposition were, Mooney could find something to squabble about. In the main, it has to be said, the chief cause of contention was Mooney's interest in finance and his reluctance to part with it. The first complainant was James Corr, who, in February 1853, wrote that he was suffering from exhaustion and ill health. His weekly receipts amounted only to 10s. or one sixteenth of the Sunday collection. Stole fees were very small, amounting to £5 for the whole year. From this money, he was expected to supply food and pay for lodgings and a servant. Small wonder that the exhausted curate was looking for a priest to supply for him.³⁴

Corr cannot have had much satisfaction as he was writing again, this time informing Cullen that Mooney had taken the collection from the novenas, which was supposed to go to the priest who conducted the service.³⁵ Mooney's tactic in response to such letters of complaint was to launch an attack on his curates. In August 1860, he wrote to Cullen complaining about a Fr. Nolan, who, said Mooney, had neglected his duties and had been "violent and disrespectful" in his conduct. He went on to detail various instances of the curate's neglect and rudeness. "It is not long since I had to complain of Mr. Tracey", Mooney wrote, referring to another of his curates, "I regard him now as kept in order by absolute terror".³⁶ With Mooney it was difficult to be on the right side. Two years later, he was requesting the removal of a curate, Francis O'Neill, on the grounds that he had been starting mass too early.³⁷ Some months later, it was Nolan's turn again. This time the complaint was that he "had left his hour vacant this morning" and his removal was also requested.³⁸

In 1864, Mooney was on the attack again and once more, the target was Francis O'Neill, who, according to the P.P., had interrupted a meeting of parishioners. The meeting was being held in Mooney's apartments to discuss means of raising funds to pay for a new confessional and an organ. "The greatest unanimity seemed to prevail", Mooney reported to Cullen, "when to my utter astonishment my curate, Fr. O'Neill, entered the meeting accompanied with Alderman Reynolds and with his aid divided our

³⁴ James Corr to Cullen, St. Audeon's, 22 High St., 2 Feb 1853, DDA.

³⁵ James Corr to Cullen, 22 High St., 2 Aug 1860, DDA.

³⁶ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, 22 High St., 27 Aug 1860, DDA.

³⁷ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, 22 High St., 5 Jan [1862], DDA.

³⁸ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, High St., 26 Aug 1862, DDA.

councils, interrupted our proceedings and frustrated, as far as he could, the object of our meetings". Mooney stated that O'Neill, who knew of the parish debts, instead of assisting his P.P. to meet the debts, tried to encourage the parishioners to begin the erection of a new parochial house immediately. "On the same occasion", Mooney continued, "he made the most reckless and groundless assertions with reference to my means of paying rent. He showed, on the occasion, his usual wildness, violence and imprudence. I have reason to believe he is going about through the parish constantly making assertions about matters of which he knows nothing". And then came the predictable request: "In conclusion, he has given me so much opposition in the administration of my parish that I must pray you to remove him".³⁹

By October of the same year, Nolan's turn had come round again. This time, Mooney alleged that, when he was attempting to make a settlement of curacy, Nolan had ordered him out of the vestry, called him "a wicked old man", described him as "insane" and said that he was about to be suspended "as a disgrace to the Diocese". "It is admitted now", the aggrieved P.P. observed, "that I cannot any more speak to him without running the risk of receiving some greivous [sic] personal injury". Nolan had nearly broken his heart, said Mooney, as he once again implored Cullen to remove the offending curate.⁴⁰ The following month, Nolan's alleged irregularities were reported once more, including being late for confessions and, on one occasion, not being present at all.⁴¹ Before the end of the year, Mooney had another curate, a Fr. Beechinor, to find fault with. Beechinor was described as "very unmanageable" and "of little or no assistance" to his P.P. It was alleged, too, that Beechinor was constantly quarrelling about pecuniary matters and refusing to pay for his gas at night - clearly, this was a curate who had decided to take a definite stand and so, had incurred the wrath of the irascible Mooney.⁴²

There is no doubt but that dissatisfaction with the division of parochial dues was at the root of the disagreements at St. Audeon's. "On yesterday, after paying all expenses, the amount of the collection for each amounted to 5s. and some odd pence", Mooney reported in November 1864.⁴³ The curate Nolan had the same story for Cullen but he added that, out of this 5s. and 5d., the curates were expected to pay for lodgings and servants. "The thing is impossible, my Lord," Nolan protested to his

³⁹ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, Parochial House, 22 High St., 8 July 1864, DDA.

⁴⁰ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, Parochial House, 22 High St., 29 Sept 1864, DDA.

⁴¹ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, Parochial House, 22 High St., 18 Oct 1864, DDA.

⁴² Patrick Mooney to Cullen, Parochial House, High St., 7 Nov 1864, DDA.

⁴³ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, Parochial House, High St., 28 Nov 1864, DDA.

archbishop, "and the result is some of us are dreadfully in debt".⁴⁴ The collection the following month realised a similar amount and Mooney moaned about the church, which he described as being "in a state of desolation". "The very collectors at the doors declare that they are sickened by its deserted condition", he told Cullen. The curate Beechinor was still defiant and Mooney complained that he had left the house without telling him when he would return.⁴⁵

One year later, the situation had not improved very much, as Mooney reported a collection which yielded only 7s. to each priest.⁴⁶ From a parish which had supported five priests in 1856, St. Audeon's was supporting only three ten years later.⁴⁷ One can suppose that it was not a parish which was high on a curate's list as a desirable appointment and it may well have been also that the parishioners were no longer prepared to subscribe as generously to a parish priest who was so obviously avaricious and who conducted running battles with his curates. As for Mooney himself, he was now complaining that he had only one curate to do duty and he protested to Cullen that, unless he were given proper assistance, he could no longer be held responsible for the duties of his church.⁴⁸ Mooney's case also illustrates the particular difficulties facing a bishop when forced to deal with an intransigent parish priest. However the bishop might remonstrate with him or threaten him with penalties, should the offending parish priest choose to ignore the warnings, it does appear that there were very few options open to the bishop except to remove the curates.

When a new curate was appointed to St. Audeon's, he was sent there on the specific understanding that he was to receive one pound per week from the collections, as long as the other priests did not receive more than that amount. When the collection increased, the curate's share was to increase accordingly and he was also entitled to the other privileges enjoyed by his fellow curates. Diocesan authorities felt obliged to impose such detailed regulations but clearly, Patrick Mooney did not feel obliged to comply with them, as the new curate, Francis Anderson, pointed out to the vicar general, Edward McCabe, in November 1866. Amongst the sources of income, each priest was entitled to receive ten shillings for preaching at the twelve o'clock mass on Sunday. Anderson stated that, although he had preached regularly, he had never received any money. When he told the parish priest that he had complained to McCabe,

⁴⁴ C.P. Nolan to Cullen, 28 Nov 1864, DDA.

⁴⁵ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, Parochial House, 22 High St., 19 Dec 1864, DDA.

⁴⁶ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, Parochial House, 22 High St., 11 Sept 1865, DDA.

⁴⁷ Irish Catholic Directory, 1856, 1866.

⁴⁸ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, Parochial House, 22 High St., 11 Sept 1865, DDA.

Mooney simply replied that Anderson's appointment had come through Dr. Meagher and that he would do nothing until he received instructions from Meagher. Anderson further complained that Mooney kept for his own use the sum given by the military authorities for the discharge of duties at the local barracks.⁴⁹

It can be assumed that Patrick Mooney's battles with his curates continued and that peace came finally to St. Audeon's presbytery only with the death of the incorrigible parish priest in June 1867.⁵⁰ His case is a clear illustration of the difficulties posed by an intractable parish priest for church authorities and the consistent, protracted war of attrition that had to be waged to force an unwilling P.P. to concede the basic rights to curates. Obviously aware of the unhappy history of parish priest - curate relationships in the parish, one of Mooney's successors, William Irwin, when he came to reside in the new presbytery, actually drew up a formal agreement with his three curates. It was agreed that, since the P.P. occupied the greater part of the presbytery, he should contribute a greater part *pro rata* of rent, taxes and other expenses. Then there were definite arrangements about which collections should be divided and how, about the payment of servants and the division of any surplus revenue. In an attempt to prevent a recurrence of the previous unpleasantness, the last paragraph stated: " It would seem desirable that the rule here laid down should be limited to five years - that there should be an allowance for the wear and tear of furniture etc. - and young priests coming into the parish should be allowed time for payment of their quota".⁵¹

The difficulty for a bishop in dealing with a recalcitrant parish priest like Mooney was the fact that the P.P. was so well protected in law. Any P.P. aware of his rights and being sufficiently astute, could avoid the ultimate sanction of removal from his parish, or at least provoke a protracted dispute with his superiors. The case of Peter Daly, a P.P. in Galway diocese, has been documented elsewhere.⁵² The row between Daly and his bishop, John MacEvilly, was long and complex. Differences about financial matters did form part of the dispute but it was mainly a dispute about discipline - the determination of the bishop to impose his will on what he saw as insubordination on Daly's part and the parish priest's stubborn refusal to submit.

⁴⁹ Francis Anderson to McCabe, 4 Francis St., 18 Nov 1866, DDA.

⁵⁰ Irish Catholic Directory, 1869; William O'Riordan, *op. cit.*, *Reportorium Novum* 1970.

⁵¹ Letter dated 1 Feb 1878 and signed Patrick Jones C.C., Daniel Heffernan C.C., Michael Clarke C.C., DDA.

⁵² The case of Peter Daly is discussed in detail in Bane, *op. cit.*, pp. 60 -73.

Over the same period of years, Laurence Gillooly of Elphin was fighting a similar battle with one of his parish priests, Henry Brennan of Tissera. Again the context was the same - a bishop appointed to a diocese under the Cullen regime and with a mission to introduce reforms. Elphin, like Galway and Armagh, before Gillooly's arrival, had a bishop, George Browne, who was of the old school and who had allowed parish priests considerable freedom and autonomy.

Laurence Gillooly was appointed co-adjutor bishop to Elphin diocese in 1856 and he found that Brennan was already in dispute with his bishop, George Browne. The main bone of contention, which does not concern us here, was the removal of Brennan from the parish of Tissera and his transfer to Dysart. As in the case of Peter Daly of Galway, there were other undercurrents and parallel disputes which complicated greatly the principal issue. There was Browne's initial resentment to the appointment of Gillooly; there was the enmity between Brennan and his successor at Tissera, Luke Carlos; and, again as in the Daly case, there was the involvement of Cullen's rival, John MacHale of Tuam, who saw in this dispute another opportunity to confront and embarrass the reforming archbishop of Dublin.

The immediate concern of this study is the financial aspect and, like Peter Daly, Henry Brennan had problems with his curates, mostly regarding finance and the payment of the curates' salaries. In a letter to his friend, Tobias Kirby, rector of the Irish College, Rome, at the end of January 1856, Paul Cullen wrote to brief his mentor on the situation in Elphin. George Browne, or "the poor dove of Elphin" as Cullen referred to him, had called on Cullen and had reported that he was having trouble with some of his priests and, Cullen added significantly, "he is mortally afraid of the Lion" - a reference to John MacHale.⁵³

In particular, there were complaints from Matthias Naughten, who became curate to Brennan in Dysart on 26 April 1855 and who claimed that he had not been paid any monies until 2 February 1856. In the meantime, Naughten had called on Brennan several times for his salary. Brennan had offered him a salary on the basis of the findings of the arbitration of two priests. Naughten considered this "a sham settlement" since it only amounted to one third of his entitlements - "The entire loaf or no bread is my motto", Naughten declared. The curate reported that, on an occasion when Brennan had been summoned by the bishop to Roscommon to account for his tolerating in the parish a woman "who was giving scandal", Naughten himself had been

⁵³ Cullen to Kirby 31 Jan 1856, Kirby papers, *Archivium Hibernicum*, xxxi, 1973

sent for to settle the salary question. Brennan was ordered to pay, but was allowing only £20 a year, whereas the bishop was insisting on £25 a year as the curate's salary. Then, according to Naughten, Brennan had paid him one month's salary at the rate of £25 a year and "not a shilling from that to the present time...", despite the fact that Brennan had a "good living worth £220 a year". In addition, Naughten complained, Brennan had taken half the oats instead of one third and he had also kept the station money for himself. Dr. Browne had decided that where there were two chapels in the parish, the curate or curates should have one of them, but, Naughten alleged, Brennan had said that "for Pope or bishop he would not give up one of his chapels to any man". Now, Naughten pleaded, he was seeking nothing but his rights and that it was very unfair of Brennan who had already injured him to strive to injure him more.⁵⁴

Gillooly checked with one of the priests involved in the arbitration proceedings, Michael Coffey of Athlone, but Coffey was not very forthcoming, saying that he could not recall the exact details. He recalled that there was on either side "a long array of figures" and that there was "some half dozen pounds or so" claimed by Naughten. The previous bishop, Browne, had suggested to the parties to "split the difference" and the arbitrators had accepted this. Coffey felt that Naughten's objections now were not reasonable.⁵⁵

Henry Brennan's response was to resort to the tactics employed by Patrick Mooney in Dublin and he proceeded to attack his opponent. He accused Naughten of turning "the house of God into a beargarden" as a result of remarks the curate had made to the people at the Sunday mass in Dysart church. Brennan charged Naughten with inflaming the people with his talk, telling them that they should give the curate all the private masses, baptisms and sponsor money of the parish. "Oh good God, said he, why don't you take my advice", Brennan reported. He added that Naughten had objected to using the old vestments, saying that if the new vestments were not available the following Sunday, the women "would pelt with rotten eggs the clerk if he were in fault". "It was all a scene of laughing and joking about the farce and performance", Brennan wrote. Predictably, Brennan then requested Naughten's removal, saying that he himself was able "with dead ease" to do all the duties of the small parish and that two priests in it would be "two paupers no mistake". Brennan ended by stating that he was one of the oldest priests in the diocese and that he should not be worse off than other parish priests who were junior to him.⁵⁶ This letter was backed up by a letter

⁵⁴ M. Naughten to Gillooly, Cartron Kelly, 8 Nov 1856, EDA.

⁵⁵ M. Coffey to Gillooly, Lecarrow, 11 Nov [1856], EDA.

⁵⁶ Henry Brennan to Gillooly, Ballyforan, Ballinasloe, 10 Nov 1856, EDA.

from a parishioner, George Moore of Ballyforan, in which he stated that he was writing on behalf of four respectable trading men who were "shocked" at the language used by Naughten on the Sunday in question. "They never heard such language from a clergyman", Moore informed Gillooly, "and wondered that you as his superior would allow it".⁵⁷

In his defence, Naughten stated that it was not his intention to lessen the P.P. in the people's estimation. He had, in fact, spoken on charity and had cautioned the people against talking of priests and their affairs. He had advised the people "to mind their own business and let the priests alone". He maintained that he had mentioned the vestments because the people had spoken to Brennan about locking up the new vestments and chalice and he wished to excuse Brennan "by throwing the blame on the clerk". It would seem that Naughten was prepared to let the people vent their anger on the unfortunate clerk. "I may go too far but it was to save the people" was his excuse.⁵⁸

All this squabbling over vestments and Sunday masses was only to conceal the real matter at issue - the division of monies. One month later, Brennan wrote again, this time bypassing the co-adjutor bishop, Gillooly, and addressing Bishop Browne and he returned to the topic of the parish finances. He said that he had called on Naughten offering to pay him all that was due to him but that Naughten, refusing to accept the accuracy of Brennan's calculations, had "got violent and refused to settle". Naughten was now saying that he would wait until the Lenten visitation when the whole business could be settled but this did not suit Brennan, who had destroyed all his papers "supposing they were not wanted". Naughten wanted either the Dysart or Ballyforan collection but Brennan was offering him one third of the entire collection. Brennan promised to make a full list of revenues available to the bishop and then he hoped the bishop would order Naughten to refund money. The parish priest then went on to make charges against Naughten, alleging that the curate was seeking to lower him in the public estimation as far as he could. Once more he requested Naughten's removal saying "I will never make any freedom with one who has done all in his power to ruin me".⁵⁹

No doubt, these sentiments were shared by the curate Naughten and the matter had reached an impasse. Gillooly's problems were compounded by the indecisiveness

⁵⁷ G. Moore to Brennan, Ballyforan, 10 Nov 1856, EDA.

⁵⁸ M. Naughten to Gillooly, Cartron Kelly, 26 Nov 1856, EDA.

⁵⁹ Henry Brennan to Browne, Dysart, 18 Dec 1856, EDA.

of the bishop, George Browne, and the antipathy that existed at that time between Browne and Gillooly. In February 1857, Paul Cullen noted that Browne and Gillooly were fighting and he it was who succeeded in effecting a reconciliation by bringing the two men together and "arranging matters between them".⁶⁰

Relations between Brennan and his curates did not improve and in 1861, another curate, R.J. Dufficy, was reporting to Gillooly, now bishop of the diocese, on what he called Brennan's maladministration. This included a bizarre affair in which Brennan had succeeded in getting a licence for a public house for one of his tenants, despite the opposition of the bishop and some of the parishioners. When the licence was granted, Dufficy told how Brennan had organised a great celebration, ordering his nephew and his servants to "burn the whole of a large stack of wheaten straw" as a triumphal illumination. The curate was of the opinion that the matter would be the cause of "a train of evils" and quarrels and he even feared murder. Then, there was the inevitable dispute about money. The collection at Dysart on Christmas Day had amounted to £16 but, in Dufficy's opinion, it would have been far greater except that Brennan allowed many people to pay himself personally later so that he would not be obliged to share the money with the curate. He had refused to pay Dufficy £4 of his salary which was owing.⁶¹

Brennan's practice of lighting torches to celebrate his victories was alluded to by Denis Kelly, the owner of the other public house. Kelly referred to the "apparently incendiary movements of Mr. Brennan so far as what is termed the lighting of wisps of straws on trifling occasions". Apart from the granting of the licence to Kelly's nephew and opponent in the licensing trade in Dysart, the other "trifling occasion" was the campaign run by a candidate nominated by Brennan to oppose Kelly for the position of Poor Law Guardian in the Elphin district. Kelly had been victorious but would not allow fires to be lit. Kelly also stated that after three years' absence from church, he and his family had been persuaded by the "kind and good Fr. Dufficy" to return. Brennan, however, continued to insult them, going so far as to call him a bastard more than once at the crossroads. "I think nothing of it", said the long suffering Kelly, "as your Lordship could overlook it".⁶²

Matters between Brennan and his curate worsened and in October, Dufficy complained that he had gone to the school to give lessons but had not been allowed to

⁶⁰Cullen to Kirby, 1 Feb 1857; Cullen to Kirby, 22 July 1857, Kirby papers, *Arch. Hib.*, xxxi1973.

⁶¹ Rich. J. Dufficy to Gillooly, Ballyforan, Ballinasloe, 6 Jan 1861, EDA.

⁶² Denis Kelly to Gillooly, Cysart, Ballyforan, 6 April 1861, EDA.

teach. He had consulted Dr. Coffey of Athlone on this matter but Coffey's advice was to wait for direction from Gillooly. There were other scandals in the parish, said Dufficy, which he would relate to the bishop when he visited him. Brennan, he repeated, was receiving almost all the revenues of the parish and since the previous February, Dufficy had received some £24 and one third of the oats. He was not hopeful for the future and, judging by other years, he expected to receive scarcely £60. "I need not say", he told the bishop, "that I could not live in this house with such a trifling sum".⁶³

Brennan was still at war with his bishop over the question of his transfer and he appealed the case to his Metropolitan, John MacHale, thus establishing a precedent which would be followed by others like Peter Daly of Galway. MacHale was quite happy to intervene and he gave a decision in favour of Brennan as it might serve to embarrass Gillooly and his allies in the hierarchy. Paul Cullen took up the cudgels for Gillooly at Rome and he contacted Tobias Kirby, warning that a decision in favour of Brennan and MacHale would cause great injury to Gillooly and to religion.⁶⁴ Gillooly was upset about MacHale's decision in favour of Brennan and he wrote to Rome saying that this would have disastrous effects if Dr. MacHale could "freely champion the revolting priests".⁶⁵ Once the matter had been referred to Rome, where Paul Cullen's influence was paramount, there could be only one outcome and on 14 March 1864, Gillooly informed Kirby that Brennan had submitted as he had been ordered to do by Propaganda. MacHale had been admonished for his part in the affair,⁶⁶ something which was to be replicated in the Peter Daly case.

The final act of the drama was played out in Elphin and it ended with the written resignation of Henry Brennan as parish priest on 16 September 1864, after years of stubborn resistance to his ecclesiastical superiors.⁶⁷ The resignation must also have been welcome news for curates, given that Brennan had never been able to keep one for any longer than four years.⁶⁸

⁶³ R.J. Dufficy to Gillooly, Ballyforan, Ballinasloe, 30 Oct 1861, EDA.

⁶⁴ Gillooly to Kirby, 26 Oct 1862; Cullen to Kirby, 11 Aug 1863; quoted in Pádraig Ó Tuairisg, *Ard-dheoise Thuama agus Cartlann Cholaiste na nGael sa Roimh sa 19u haois deag*, [unpublished M.A. thesis U.C.G. 1982], lgh. 423, 426.

⁶⁵ Gillooly to Kirby, 21 Aug 1863, Ó Tuairisg, *op. cit.*, l. 427.

⁶⁶ Gillooly to Kirby, 14 March 1864, Ó Tuairisg, *op. cit.*, l. 439.

⁶⁷ Resignation of Henry Brennan, *parochus*, Dysart, dated 16 Sept 1864, EDA.

⁶⁸ Irish Catholic Directory 1858, 1860, 1862, 1864.

The defeat of Henry Brennan, along with that of Peter Daly in Galway, was an important affirmation for Cullen and the reformers, just as it was a clear signal to MacHale and the old brigade that the new regime was in favour at Rome. The reformers, however, could not legislate for the personal relations between P.P's and curates or for the personal avarice and financial operations of individual priests. Cullen's successor in Dublin, Edward McCabe, who, if anything was stricter and more inflexible than his master, found the problem ongoing and quite intractable. In October 1880, the parish priest of Kilcullen, M. P. Langan, informed McCabe that a curate, Fr. Byrnes, had received a quarter of the dues and if he wished to have more, Langan's proposal was that the staff of the parish be reduced - "I take the liberty of suggesting the propriety of removing the two curates that are here at present as a new order of things should be established if you leave but one curate here".⁶⁹ And when later, the two curates appealed to the parish priest, they evoked no great sympathy from Langan, who this time told McCabe: "Their appeal was so urgent and they appeared so unfit and so unwilling to proceed with their duties that on this day I sought the advice of Fr. Whittle at whose suggestion I beg most respectfully... to undertake the administration of the parish with the aid of one curate...".⁷⁰ Again the solution being proposed - if there are two curates demanding a greater share of the revenue, then remove one or both.

In every diocese, it seemed, there was at least one parish priest who was sent to try the patience of his superiors. In Raphoe diocese, it was John D. McGarvey, parish priest of Milford, whose penchant for accumulating wealth and property and unwillingness to part with money caused ongoing problems for his bishop, James McDevitt. Following complaints from his curates early in 1873 about division of revenue, McGarvey wrote that the two curates should be content with half of the revenues of the parish and he said that one of the curates, Bernard Walker, was unhappy simply because McGarvey did not allow him to hold a collection.⁷¹ Walker, who himself became quite skilled in the art of accumulating wealth and property,⁷² registered further complaints but McGarvey insisted that he was supported by the statutes and, describing Walker as stubborn, he called for his removal.⁷³ He referred

⁶⁹ M. P. Langan to McCabe, Kilcullen, 4 Oct 1880, DDA.

⁷⁰ M. P. Langan to McCabe, Kilcullen, 5 Nov 1880, DDA.

⁷¹ J. D. McGarvey to McDevitt, Milford, 7Feb 1873, RDA.

⁷² Walker left assets amounting to £1,653 including a house and two farms; Londonderry DR Will Book, 1896-97, p.173, NIPRO.

⁷³ J. D. McGarvey to McDevitt, Milford, 28 March 1873, RDA.

the bishop to the 17th decree of the provincial Synod of Drogheda and confidently declared that if he were wrong, then he was prepared to change.⁷⁴

In April, the bishop wrote to McGarvey informing him that the two curates had complained that they had not received their share of offerings in the case of a parishioner who had died in the workhouse in the fever hospital and the parish priest was requested to state his case.⁷⁵ McGarvey continued to resist and in March of the following year, he told the bishop that there had not been a settlement since December 11th. He was not prepared to concede that the curates should have two thirds of the workhouse salary even if they did all the work.⁷⁶ A month later, Walker wrote to say that he and the other curate had been given what he called "a dividend for the workhouse salary".⁷⁷

McGarvey was determined to fight his case to the last and he was even prepared to bring it to Rome. "As they will naturally ask me what brought me to Rome", he wrote, before requesting the bishop to explain to him why he was being granted only one third of income when parish priests were entitled to one half when they had two curates.⁷⁸ A settlement was agreed in December 1876 but such is the tone of McGarvey's grudging acceptance in a letter to McDevitt that the bishop cannot have been complacent about having heard the last of John D. McGarvey and his financial difficulties.

In 1885, Michael Clarke, the curate at Castledermot, Co. Kildare, brought another set of problems to the attention of William Walsh, McCabe's successor as archbishop of Dublin. Clarke had four complaints to register against his P.P., Joseph Deighan. Firstly, Deighan was going to require Clarke to pay rent for the house in which he lived. It was on the holding left by the late archdeacon, who had left instructions that the house should be free of rent for curates. Clarke argued that the house was parochial property and not Deighan's personal property. He argued further that not only should the curate have his house rent free, as the P.P. had, but that he should also have the use of one third part of the holding for his horse and such purposes. Secondly, Deighan was claiming two thirds of the dead list money, for which there was no precedent in the diocese. In Clarke's view, the money donated by

⁷⁴ J. D. McGarvey to McDevitt, Milford, 31 March 1873, RDA.

⁷⁵ James McDevitt to McGarvey, Letterkenny, 26 April 1873 (copy), RDA.

⁷⁶ J. D. McGarvey to McDevitt, Milford, 24 March 1874, RDA.

⁷⁷ Bernard Walker to McDevitt, Rathmullen, 13 April 1874, RDA.

⁷⁸ J. D. McGarvey to McDevitt, Milford, 16 Aug 1874, RDA.

the people was for celebration of masses and could not be considered parochial dues. Curates were generally afraid to bring these matters before their superiors as it might militate against their prospects for promotion in the diocese. The third complaint referred to a mission which had been held recently in the parish. The missionaries had told Clarke that there had been no cost to Deighan and Clarke pointed out that usually at mission time, there was an extra payment to curates for the extra work involved. Clarke had suggested this to Deighan but the P.P. would not even listen to him. Deighan should be asked to produce an account of the mission receipts, Clarke proposed to the archbishop. Lastly, Clarke charged, Deighan was claiming two thirds of the hay and oats. There was no regular collection in the parish but occasionally, parishioners sent the priests a barrel of oats or a load of hay. Deighan had received double the amount of hay and Clarke added that he himself had to do all the work of the parish, his horse had broken down and he had been obliged to buy two others. So, if Deighan's arrangement held, then Clarke would be forced to buy extra quantities of hay and oats, which he could not afford. Clarke then put the question directly to Walsh - Did the archbishop think he should give Deighan the part of the hay that he had received from the people to feed his horses, especially as the P.P. had "none of that work to do"?⁷⁹

It would have been interesting to hear the archbishop's response to this query and to observe his method of dealing with an avaricious parish priest but, unfortunately, that response is not available to us. Not all P.P.'s, of course, were grasping or miserly and some even attempted to organise the finances in such a way as to prevent all the unseemly squabbling about the division of parish revenue. Such a P.P. was John Ryan of St. Joseph's, Berkeley St., Dublin, who, in 1890, put forward proposals for the consideration of Archbishop Walsh. Ryan, conscious of disputes that had occurred in the parish in previous years, proposed that certain collections and specified monies be set aside and form one common fund divisible by five - two parts for the P.P. and one each for the three curates. This proposal was being applied to a particularly affluent parish, as the amount of this fund came to £1,000 and there would be money in addition to pay parish expenses and to put towards reducing the parish debt. If the archbishop and the vicars were to sanction this, Ryan argued, they would be able to work "harmoniously and heartily together", and after two years, there would not be "one cent due on Berkeley St."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Michael Clarke to Walsh, Castledermot, Co. Kildare, 25 Nov 1885, DDA.

⁸⁰ Jn. Ryan, P.P. to Walsh, St. Joseph's, Berkeley St., 5 May 1890, DDA.

Walsh, true to his nature, adopted a cautious approach to the proposal, arguing that the sources of income were too variable and fearing that its acceptance might create a precedent within the diocese. In a response, signed by the P.P. and the three curates, Ryan listed four or five fixed sources which would still realise £1,000 a year and yet leave a balance to meet ordinary church expenses and form a sinking fund to clear off the parish debt. Ryan and his curates had made inquiries in many city parishes and in the suburbs and they reported that there was no uniformity evident in any of their financial arrangements. Their proposal was not a novelty, as could be shown from the practice of two other Dublin parishes, Haddington Road and St. Agatha's. These, like Berkeley St., were new parishes and Ryan was confident that, if the proposed arrangement were allowed to proceed, then harmony would prevail among the priests of the parish.⁸¹

Not so accommodating was Edward Dukay, the parish priest of Moone, also in Dublin diocese. Dukay, who emerges from his letters as a rather cantankerous individual, actually provoked a quarrel by refusing to pay his curate in order to make a point that the parish "was not capable of sustaining a P.P. and curate". On 2 March 1893, the curate, Patrick Dunne, wrote to Canon Fitzpatrick to say that Dukay would not allow him to do duty in the parish and was refusing to give him any part of parish revenue from February Ist. The reason stated was that Dukay "had entered his protest with Dr. Walsh, dating from that time, against the support of a curate" in the parish. Furthermore, he would not allow his servants to cater for the needs of the curate, stating that if the curate had to remain there, then the archbishop would have to send a servant to support him. "You can judge for yourself what a life I must be leading here just now", the curate pleaded, as he begged Fitzpatrick to intervene and put an end, as soon as possible, to "this sad state of affairs".⁸²

The matter was taken up by Canon James Germaine, who was deputed by Walsh to carry out an investigation. The canon wrote to the two protagonists, informing them that he would interview them at Moone. Dukay did not want this as he felt that Germaine's arrival in the parish would "create a sensation and cause talk among the parishioners". Germaine concluded that Dunne's allegations were substantially correct, although Dukay, obviously at a loss to provide a reasonable explanation for his actions, maintained that he had not intended to act towards Dunne as his words might imply. The situation was very unpleasant after what had happened, but Dunne, who

⁸¹ St. Joseph's, Berkeley St., The financial relations of the priests, May 1990, signed Jn. Ryan P.P., M. Butler C.C., M. Byrne C.C., Patrick Ryan C.C. DDA.

⁸² Patrick Dunne to Canon Fitzpatrick, Moone, 2 March 1893, DDA.

was living separately in the parochial house, had told Germaine that he would prefer Moone to any other parish in the diocese.⁸³

The following month, Germaine discussed the matter with Dukay again and the P.P. invited him to inspect the book in which dues received were recorded. This was done and Dukay told Germaine that there had been no settlement with the curate since the previous Christmas, as was borne out by the curate, Dunne. The archbishop had written to Dukay, calling his attention to Statute 213 of the synod of Maynooth of 1831 which deals with the division of parochial revenue.⁸⁴ Dukay's response was simply to state that when the bishops were framing this statute, they could not have had a parish like Moone in mind. From the dues book, it appeared that £150 was the average amount of total dues received annually from parishioners.⁸⁵

Archbishop Walsh was not prepared to accept Dukay's assertion that the parish could not afford a curate and he wrote a strong letter to the P.P., again reminding him of his obligations as outlined in the statute of the synod of 1831. The statute clearly stated that whatever income was received should be divided according to the regulations at the end of each month. Walsh had hoped that, with the intervention of Germaine, the matter would be rectified immediately but this had not happened and he viewed Dukay's continued refusal as "an open and disedifying disregard of all ecclesiastical authority in the diocese...". He now obliged the P.P. to make the necessary division with his curate dating back to the last settlement and that proof of such a settlement be made available on Monday 19 July, the day of the diocesan retreat at Maynooth.⁸⁶

The parish priest was proving obstinate and in his reply to the archbishop's command, he questioned the relevance of the statute to his particular situation. Dukay argued that the statute applied to a parish which could "afford decent support" and that there was not sufficient income in Moone parish to support two priests. He repeated that he had told Walsh previously that he would not be paying the curate in future and that he had shown him the figures. Dukay held that the archbishop had admitted that it was not easy to pay a curate. He concluded by reaffirming that he could not pay Dunne and that he was, in fact, trying to recoup his loss.⁸⁷

⁸³ James Canon Germaine to Walsh, Athy, 8 March 1893, DDA.

⁸⁴ cf. *Statuta Dioecesana per provinciam Dubliniensem observanda*. (Dublin 1831).

⁸⁵ James Canon Germaine to Walsh, Athy, 18 April 1893, DDA.

⁸⁶ William Walsh to Dukay, Archbishop's House, Dublin, 20 June 1893, (copy), DDA.

⁸⁷ Edward Dukay to Walsh, Moone, 22 June 1893, DDA.

Two weeks before the deadline of 19 July, Dukay wrote to Walsh asking him to remove Dunne and he included figures showing the amounts of collections over ten months, January to October, totalling £128.10s.2d. This, he said, showed that it was quite impossible for him to pay a curate and servants.⁸⁸ To this the archbishop replied very curtly: "As Monday next is the day I mentioned in requiring your compliance with the Diocesan statute to which I referred you and as I may not be at Maynooth that day, I write to say that, in my absence, Dr. Donnelly will act for me in receiving from you the account of the settlement".⁸⁹

This warning would also appear to have been ignored by the brinksman Dukay, because as late as the following November, Patrick Dunne was writing to affirm that he had received Walsh's letter transferring him to Arklow and he went on to say that Dukay had not settled with him since and that he had received only £19 for the past ten months.⁹⁰ An angry Walsh wrote immediately to the obstinate parish priest - "It seems to me that you have not even yet realised the seriousness of the position into which you are forcing me and the Vicars General", he began. Then he warned that diocesan authority would have to be obeyed and that the only reason stronger action had not been taken was that the parish priest had promised to pay within a certain time. "I regret to have to say that the time has passed when we can allow our action to be stayed by anything short of actual compliance with what you have been authoritatively directed to do", thundered the exasperated Walsh, as, for the second time, he named a date for compliance with his command. He required a statement of settlement signed by both parish priest and curate to be sent to him by the following Monday.⁹¹

Presumably the end of the correspondence signifies the end of the matter. Dukay's brinksmanship was not successful in its objective because, while the curate Dunne was moved to Arklow, a replacement was appointed at Moone.⁹² The case does demonstrate, though, how a determined parish priest could create a very awkward situation for the diocesan authority. Also, it must be noted that the framing of appropriate legislation at national and provincial synods did not automatically bring a satisfactory resolution to ongoing financial disputes, particularly in the case of stubborn and avaricious parish priests.

⁸⁸ Edward Dukay to Walsh, Moone, 6 July 1893, DDA.

⁸⁹ William J. Walsh to Dukay, Archbishop's House, Dublin, 8 July 1893, (copy), DDA.

⁹⁰ P. Dunne C.C. to Walsh, Moone, 7 Nov 1893, DDA.

⁹¹ William J. Walsh to Dukay, Archbishop's House, Dublin, 7 Nov 1893, DDA.

⁹² Irish Catholic Directory 1895, 1896.

Problems of shared accommodation.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw a marked impetus in the provision of parochial residences. In some cases, this meant the building of separate houses for parish priests and curates and in others, the building of a single presbytery which was intended to house all the clergy of the parish. In the latter situation, this brought problems for priests who disagreed but who were obliged to live together in the same residence.

In a circular to the clergy of Cashel and Emly on Christmas Day 1880, Archbishop Croke announced that the principle of "separate maintenance" had been adopted at the diocesan synod in July.⁹³ Parish priests and curates were now free to live apart or to share accommodation if they so wished. This was granting formal recognition to the problems arising from the situation where parish priests and curates were forced to share the one house. It was vitally important that men who had to share a residence should be of such disposition that they might, at the very least, accord to one another the basic civilities. When there were differences and when disputes arose, whether financial or otherwise, it was inevitable in the hothouse of the shared parochial residence that these differences could be exaggerated and that what began as a minor disagreement could develop into a full scale row.

The discerning parish priest of Aghavas, Carrigallen, in the diocese of Ardagh, W.W. Brady, was determined that he would not share his house with any curate and he put his arguments in a letter to his bishop in November 1884. "It is a fruitful source of sin - strife and enmity between priests where none would be otherwise", he wrote, "It has been tried in many dioceses and has proved to be the cause of much unhappiness to both P.P's and curates and endless trouble to the Bishop". He pointed out that Dr. Conaty of Kilmore was encouraging the building of separate houses for the curates, as was Dr. Gillooly of Elphin. It had been the rule in Meath for the curates to live with the P.P's, but now they were allowed to lodge out of the parochial house. "The system is bad", he declared, "and condemned on general grounds...." before going on to give particular reasons as to why it was not suited to the parish of Aghavas. Some of these particular reasons were less convincing, as, for instance, the argument that when a curate paid for fresh meat, he must have it and it was impossible to keep an instant supply of fresh meat in a place like Aghavas.⁹⁴

⁹³ Circular to the clergy of Cashel and Emly, T.W. Croke, 25 Dec 1880, CDA.

⁹⁴ Wm. W. Brady P.P. to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 12 Nov 1884, ArdDA.

Another Ardagh parish priest, Patrick Reddy of Keadue, was equally adamant about the desirability of separate maintenance. He rejected the proposal that the curate should move into the parochial house, stating that, rather than share, he would go to live in Arigna, Ballyfarnon or to the curate's house. If there were any arrangement made about sharing, he would auction his furniture "on the first available day" and let the curate have the presbytery all to himself. "This would be simply financial ruin to me", Reddy asserted, "and I would have anything before taking him in here". His reasons, like Brady's, were personal as well as general. He was convinced that the curate, Fr. Grey, and himself would never agree - "Apart we will be good friends. Together my life would be most miserable", he argued. Like Brady, he cited increased expenditure as a reason and made it crystal clear to the bishop that there would be no shared house - "No compensation in the shape of money would induce me to allow him in here even for a time. He or I whichever you please will occupy the house, not both".⁹⁵

Where a P.P. did not approve of a curate or simply did not wish to share either his house or his parish with another priest, he could make a very clear statement to this effect by the standard of accommodation provided for his assistant. Patrick Kelly, a curate stationed at Oran, Ballydooly in Elphin diocese, was having difficulties with an unco-operative parish priest. Kelly complained that he had been "very much tossed about" since he came to the parish. The room prepared for him was not just damp but actually wet, he said, and the floors were soft. He had to go and live with a friend until he found a suitable room in Oran. From the other complaints listed in the letter, it is evident that the parish priest simply did not want Kelly as his curate and it would appear that Kelly was unduly optimistic and somewhat naive when he stated: "Now that I am in possession, we will soon be great friends until we begin to talk of the new chapel".⁹⁶

There were problems, too, when curates with strong personalities and opposing viewpoints were obliged to share the one house. Such was the case in Tipperary town in Cashel diocese where Walter Cantwell and David Humphreys were curates in 1890. Cantwell belonged to one of the levitical and influential families of the diocese while Humphreys was a leading political activist who had taken a notable part in the land

⁹⁵ P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, 14 Dec 1881, ArdDA.

⁹⁶ P.H. Kelly C.C. to Gillooly, Oran, Ballydooly, 15 Sept 1858, EDA.

agitation.⁹⁷ It is difficult to see how the one house could contain two such egos peacefully and the problems that might have been predicted did indeed surface. It would seem that complaints had been made to Archbishop Croke about Cantwell's behaviour and in his response, Cantwell gave his side of the story. He pointed out that his room was situated directly under Humphreys' and the least movement was audible. Humphreys often had visitors in his room but, Cantwell complained, they sometimes remained until "close on eleven o'clock", which he did not consider reasonable. One night, he went to bed at nine o'clock and he was scarcely abed when "in came a batch of those fellows", who became so noisy that Cantwell had to rise and come down to the sitting room until they had left. He had to say mass at six a.m. and this kind of thing was a frequent occurrence, he declared.

The early to bed Cantwell then went on to deal with the specific complaints that had been made against him. On a particular night, he had gone to Humphreys' room at 10.20 p.m., knocked on the door and, when allowed in, addressed the "gentlemen present", pointing out to them the inconvenience caused him by such late visits. According to Cantwell, Humphreys got up and walked over "in a pugnacious attitude". He then ordered Cantwell to leave the room - "I would be ashamed to address a shoe-black in the same manner" was Cantwell's comment. Cantwell further alleged that one of the visitors, Gill, had called him a liar and that the other visitors were equally impertinent, accusing him of looking for an appointment for his brother in Dublin Castle. However, their conduct was easily explained, the writer continued, as they had been present at a meeting earlier in the evening and Canon Cahill, who was in the chair, had told Cantwell that they were under the influence of drink even then. "Is it not unbearable", Cantwell moaned, "that the property and lives of the good people of Tipperary should be in the hands of a drunken gang like that - men who have absolutely nothing to lose but everything to gain by its prolongation". These men were tyrants, he added, "who had trampled on all who crossed their paths" and, if he were to suffer for his conduct, then he was sure that nine tenths of the people of Tipperary would endorse his action.⁹⁸

The situation in the Tipperary presbytery was seriously aggravated by the fact that the two curates held opposing political views. Cantwell had also been accused of preaching a political sermon the previous Sunday. He defended himself by saying that

⁹⁷ cf. James O'Shea, *Priests, Politics and Society in Post-Famine Ireland*, (Dublin 1983); D.G. Marnane, *Tipperary Town and the Smith Barry Estate 1885-1895* (M.A. thesis, U.C.D. 1975).

⁹⁸ Walter Cantwell to Croke, Tipperary, 20 Sept 1890, CDA.

he could not remain deaf "to the complaints and irritation which pervaded every class of society - rich and poor - and which, if allowed to continue, would ... end in bloodshed". He stated that people present would vouch that this was not a political sermon. He denied that his words had led to the arrest of Dillon and O'Brien and he had answered this in his letter to the *Freeman*. Then, in the last paragraph of his lengthy letter, Cantwell admitted that there had been a "scuffle" but added: "I did not impale him, I did not attempt repeatedly to strike him". He declared that Humphreys had proved himself a coward, adding that when he had made his point, he had retired from the scene. He apologised to the archbishop for any scandal given but immediately, he added that if it had occurred years ago, there would have been very few reports from Tipperary, as Humphreys was "as mute as a lamb - and as mild as a dove ever since". Cantwell was aware that Croke was now in a dilemma as to what action to take, saying: "You are pressed on the one side to take strong action against me - either to punish me by suspension or removal; on the other side, our past relations stay your hand from taking any steps that might be construed into harshness towards me". Cantwell, then, offered a solution which he must have known would not be acceptable, stating that he was prepared to accept cheerfully either suspension or removal as the smallest sacrifice he could make for Croke's kindness and friendship towards him since he came to the diocese.⁹⁹

It is surprising to find that neither of the two Tipperary protagonists were transferred to another parish and it may be that some kind of truce was agreed as both priests continued to minister in the same parish.¹⁰⁰ Croke's response to the dilemma in which he found himself was to leave the situation unchanged. It might well have been that the archbishop, knowing that the removal of one curate would be seen as a victory for the other, did not wish to incur the wrath of either of these very strong personalities.

This kind of petty squabbling over what might seem to be relatively minor matters could also occur in the situation where the house servants were not acceptable to all the priests. The balance in the house could easily be upset when a particular servant was seen to be more attentive to or more familiar with one of the priests. Such was the case in the presbytery in North Richmond St., Dublin, where one of the curates, John O'Hanlon, complained about a servant who, he said, had "offered herself" as servant to another curate, James Quinn. O'Hanlon's complaint was that the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Irish Catholic Directory 1891,1892,1893.

newcomer was "no time in the house when she gave her impertinence and abuse" to others in the house, including priests and servants. He had spoken to Quinn about it but the result was that she became even more abusive and more annoying. "She is always in his room morning, noon and night, reading papers and books for her, chatting and laughing with her.... " O'Hanlon reported. She took all her meals in the parlour with Quinn and boasted of her familiarity with him "to the astonishment of persons". She had even been sighted one night "coming stealthly [sic] from his bedroom", although, the writer added, "I believe nothing wrong occurred... ". He had spoken to Quinn about "the danger and the folly" but Quinn had replied that he would thank O'Hanlon not to interfere with his servant. "There are plenty of other things", the report continued, "such as singing through the house especially passing my door ".¹⁰¹ Enclosed with this letter was another from the P.P., Francis Doran, who complained of having been insulted by Quinn. O'Hanlon had come to the P.P. but Doran felt that he could not interfere and he was now laying the matter before the diocesan authorities. He suggested that, in view of all that occurred, a more suitable place might be found for Quinn.¹⁰²

As a result of these complaints, Quinn was removed from the parish, probably to a place of retreat, since he remained off the mission for a period.¹⁰³ Later, he was given a post as chaplain at St. Joseph's Asylum, Portland Row.¹⁰⁴ This kind of assignment for one who had been a curate meant that he was now on probation and that he would have to prove himself before being restored to his former status.

In Templemore, in Cashel diocese in 1891, Canon Meagher's three curates attempted to resolve their difficulties in a rational manner. The three curates drew up a formal agreement aimed at securing a satisfactory *modus vivendi* in the parochial house. They agreed that there would be a common staff of servants - two girls (one of whom was to be housekeeper) and one boy - to attend the three priests. This system, they stated, was "time-honoured throughout Dublin" and had given universal satisfaction. They then agreed to the following provisos - no priest was to carry on horse-trafficking in the presbytery; no priest was to seek stabling for his horse from a parishioner; no one was allowed to remain in the yard, stables or kitchen, except strictly

¹⁰¹ Unfinished letter, 17 Nth. Richmond St., 4 Jan 1868, DDA.

¹⁰² Francis Doran to [unnamed], 12 Summer Hill Parochial House, 6 Jan 1868, DDA.(enclosed with above).

¹⁰³ Irish Catholic Directory 1869.

¹⁰⁴ Irish Catholic Directory 1871.

on business.¹⁰⁵ There followed other regulations, including an agreement to share the cost of coal and oil and regulations regarding visitors and servants.¹⁰⁶

These documents were forwarded to Croke for his approval. The archbishop commented that there was no mention made of "eatables and drinkables" nor any reference as to who should provide them or pay for them or "the general run of the house". He thought it might be preferable to allow one of the priests to run the house indefinitely or else let them take responsibility in turn.¹⁰⁷ The curates agreed that the costs of food and drink should be shared and, unless a guest were present, no "common drinkables" should be used at table. Time of dinner was agreed and the senior curate was given the responsibility of engaging and discharging servants.¹⁰⁸

In a situation such as this where domestic details had to be agreed formally, it was an indication of existing disputes between priests as well as an attempt to preclude future disagreements. The situation in the Damastown presbytery in Dublin was such that it was necessary to draw up a similar formal agreement between parish priest and curate. According to this arrangement, witnessed by a neighbouring priest, the curate agreed to pay the P.P. £60 a year for his support, "coal, candle light, servants' washing and maintenance of house".¹⁰⁹

It was not uncommon in nineteenth century parochial houses to find a member or members of the priest's family engaged as servants or living with the priest. As is very evident from the study of clerical wills, quite frequently a close relative of the parish priest, such as a niece or sister, was engaged as housekeeper. This was another fruitful source of disagreements, especially where the parochial house had become something of a family residence. The situation in Ferbane, where Canon Patrick Sheridan held court, led to several disputes. Sheridan, who had his share of problems with his creditors and his parishioners, had a number of curates who objected to sharing a house with the parish priest and members of his family.

¹⁰⁵ P. O'Keeffe C.C., M.J. Cleary C.C., P. Murphy C.C., The Presbytery, Templemore to Canon Meagher, 24 Jan 1891, CDA.

¹⁰⁶ P. O'Keeffe C.C., M.J. Cleary C.C., P. Murphy C.C., The Presbytery Templemore, 25 Jan 1891, CDA.

¹⁰⁷ T.W. Croke to Canon Meagher, The Palace, Thurles, 28 Jan 1891, CDA.

¹⁰⁸ P. O'Keeffe C.C., M.J. Cleary C.C., P. Murphy C.C., to Canon Meagher, Templemore, 30 Jan 1891, CDA.

¹⁰⁹ Damastown, Co. Dublin, 28 Nov 1881, Signed W.B. Kelly, P.J. Ryan, Witness L. Farrelly C.C., DDA.

The first intimation of trouble came when the vicar general, Neil O'Flanagan of Granard, in March 1882, informed the bishop, Bartholomew Woodlock, that Sheridan was objecting to a curate taking up residence at High Street, Ferbane, apart from the parochial house. If the Canon was going to object to this, O'Flanagan observed, then he should comply with the statute which ruled that no blood relations or young female relatives be kept at the parochial house when there were curates resident there.¹¹⁰

That same month, one of the curates at Ferbane, Joseph Rincon, reported to Woodlock that he had conveyed to Sheridan the bishop's wish that the curate should live at the second church. Sheridan had asked the curate if he would like this and when Rincon said yes, Sheridan said he might send Fr. McGrath, as he would prefer to have Rincon living with him. Rincon hoped that Woodlock would stand by his arrangement and have someone else sent to live in the parochial house, as he was not happy there.¹¹¹ Four days later, he wrote again to say that he had discussed the matter with Canon Lee, who had advised him to insist on moving to High St. and had promised that he would discuss it with Sheridan on his return.¹¹²

Three years later, Woodlock was again writing to Sheridan to inform him that both his curates were very dissatisfied. One cause of the dissatisfaction was the fact that Sheridan's sister and niece were living in the parochial house. Woodlock, who always chose his words carefully when dealing with the truculent Sheridan, thought that the complaint was "not altogether without foundation... ". "All things considered", the bishop recommended, "I think the best way to cut the Gordian knot must be for the two curates to live outside the parochial house". He had heard that Sheridan had bought the big house at the bridge and he suggested that the curates move there. Woodlock ended by saying that he could not grant Sheridan his request that the number of curates in the parish be reduced from three to two.¹¹³

In his reply, Sheridan reminded the bishop that he had promised to remove one of the curates. The bishop's allusion to his family he found painful, as he felt that whatever complaint might be found with himself, none could be found with his family. Then, in a tone of offended dignity, Sheridan referred to all his efforts for religion in Ardagh and once more, he repeated his request for the removal of Fr. Conefrey. This

¹¹⁰ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 1 March 1882, ArdDA; cf. *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae apud Thurles*, MDCCCL.

¹¹¹ Joseph A. Rincon to Woodlock, Ferbane, King's Co., 20 March 1882, ArdDA.

¹¹² Joseph A. Rincon to Woodlock, Ferbane, King's Co., 24 March 1882, ArdDA.

¹¹³ Barth. Woodlock to Sheridan, Longford, 9 July 1889 [should be 1885], (copy), ArdDA.

was followed by another letter in which he told the bishop that there were never more than two priests in Ferbane parish even when there was twice the population. He still wanted Conefrey removed, remarking, "You know as well as I can tell you my reason for asking".¹¹⁴

On the very day that Sheridan wrote his letter, another curate, Thomas O'Reilly, was also writing to the bishop. O'Reilly expressed his wish to leave the parochial house quickly and move to a temporary lodging in the village. He could easily procure "comfortable and respectable lodgings" in which he and Conefrey could live together.¹¹⁵ But when O'Reilly broached the matter with Sheridan, he was told that the P.P. was not in a position to give a reply just then. Canon Monahan, whose advice the harrassed curate had sought, recommended Royston's Hotel as a suitable place until a house could be procured.¹¹⁶

The anxiety which was evident from these letters left Sheridan unmoved and he stated blandly that he knew of no dissension existing between the curates and himself. On the question of the curates' moving into lodgings, again Sheridan temporised, requesting a meeting with the bishop to discuss the matter. "You must be getting very derogatory news as to me, when you write in such a way to me" was the disingenuous comment from the parish priest. He returned to the attack on Conefrey, remarking "Idleness creates mischief". He was sure that Woodlock had been misinformed and he thought that his position in the diocese entitled him to more consideration than to be written to as if he were "an outlaw".¹¹⁷

Shortly afterwards, the curate Conefrey wrote to Woodlock, giving details of the kind of problems created by the presence in the parochial house of Sheridan's sister and niece. "They are the rulers of the parish", he declared, "and like others of their class know everything and quite too much in the end". More serious was his allegation that the Canon's niece was very often "in the horrors of drink". He referred to an occasion when the niece was senseless from excessive drinking and to another incident when she and the Canon were alleged to have exchanged blows. He had complaints, too, about the quality of the food, which, he said, was usually cold and very dangerous for a man in his poor state of health. "The language of Canon Sheridan and the ladies at all times unbecoming", he wrote, adding that they supplied the Canon with "all the

¹¹⁴ P. Sheridan to Woodlock, Ferbane, King's Co., 13 July 1885, ArdDA.

¹¹⁵ Thomas O'Reilly C.C. to Woodlock, Ferbane, King's Co., 13 July 1885, ArdDA.

¹¹⁶ Thomas O'Reilly to Woodlock, Ferbane, King's Co., 17 July 1885, ArdDA.

¹¹⁷ P. Sheridan to Woodlock, Ferbane, 19 July 1885, ArdDA.

polite and elegant news of the parish and well are they qualified for such work". Conefrey closed his account of the bizarre happenings of Ferbane parish by stating that he had been treated by the parish priest "in a manner unbecoming a priest and a gentleman..." and he proposed that the bishop ask Sheridan on oath about his niece's drinking habits.¹¹⁸

This account was corroborated by the other curate, Thomas O'Reilly. He added that on the occasions of funerals, baptisms and marriages, the two women "must know the amount of money received and other particulars". He found the language of one of them most objectionable - "such as I never heard before". They entered his room when he was absent and even when he was there, they came in "without any notice whatsoever". They interfered with articles in his room without his consent and he corroborated Conefrey's story about the niece's liking for drink, saying that when she was in "one of those soft, intemperate moods", she had told him the story about blows being exchanged between Sheridan and herself. Like Conefrey, O'Reilly was concerned about the quality of the food. They had to eat cold meat three or four days a week and "other grievances of that kind" which he had had to bear patiently for the last three months. He concluded: "My Lord, I now ask you judge of a house that is ruled by such peculiar women".¹¹⁹

The tactic adopted by Sheridan in response to these charges was to accuse the curates of idleness. "If I write, they will not answer me", he complained, "if I send a message, they will not come". And once more, he played for time by telling the bishop, "I will do nothing till I hear from you".¹²⁰ The bishop took what was probably the wisest course in the circumstances and both curates were moved, Conefrey to Scrabby and O'Reilly to Bornacoola. For Conefrey, it was the first of three moves in three years, as he moved to the parish of Columbkille in 1888 and to Drumlish in 1889.¹²¹

It is doubtful if there were many Ardagh curates who were seeking an appointment to Ferbane. Six years after these events, another O'Reilly, this time Francis, was writing to defend himself against charges of neglect. He denied that he had been unwilling to carry out Sheridan's instructions but, he added somewhat mysteriously, "there is a sector of his congregation when the law of God, and my own

¹¹⁸ Matthew Conefrey to Woodlock, Ferbane, King's Co., 20 July 1885, ArdDA.

¹¹⁹ Thomas O'Reilly to Walsh, Ferbane, King's Co., 21 July 1885, ArdDA.

¹²⁰ P. Sheridan to Woodlock, Ferbane, 1 April 1886, ArdDA.

¹²¹ Irish Catholic Directory 1887, 1888, 1889.

conscience demanded different treatment from what he required of me to give; or it sometimes regarded even the withholding of the sacraments". Probably, this referred to the difficulties Sheridan was having with some of his parishioners¹²² and to the efforts of the parish priest to involve his curate in those same disputes. O'Reilly stoutly rejected the charge of insubordination by stating, "whenever occasion arises that any of the parishioners introduce the name of Canon Sheridan in any matter whatever I always speak of him with reverence and esteem". He said, too, that since he had come to Ferbane, he had endeavoured to behave "with reverence and respect" towards Sheridan but had found himself "suspected and accused of things I never even thought of". The curate then stated quite reasonably that if the Canon acted towards him in a "priestly manner", he would be glad to co-operate with him in any suggestion he might make. Then, O'Reilly, clearly a man of independent mind, declared, "Of course if Canon Sheridan is not pleased with me or my work I only hope he may - as I am sure he will - get one to satisfy him better than I".¹²³

Problems similar to those of the curates of Ferbane were being experienced by John Hackett, a curate at Donoskeagh in Cashel diocese. Hackett complained to Archbishop Slattery in July 1854 about the harrassment and the insults he was receiving from members of P.P. Edward Mockler's family, who were resident in the parochial house. In this case, the archbishop took a much stronger line with the parish priest than Woodlock had ever dared take with Sheridan. Slattery ruled that the curate should not have to stay with Mockler as long as his family was there. He insisted too on the P.P. paying his curate 52 guineas a year and he ordered this "*sub poena suspensionis ipso facto*". The archbishop declared himself very upset at what was happening and he found it contrary to his endeavours to bring peace¹²⁴ to the presbyteries of Cashel.

Mockler agreed to pay his curate one guinea a week as Slattery had ordered and he told the archbishop that there had been great peace in the house since Hackett had left. The P.P. was not pleased that Slattery should have described his conduct as "outrageous" and he was sure that if an inquiry were to be held into the whole affair, it would soon be evident as to whose conduct had been outrageous.¹²⁵ The archbishop was not impressed, simply telling Mockler that he would have no further

¹²² cf. Chapter 10, Relations with the Laity.

¹²³ F. O'Reilly C.C. to Woodlock, 14 Nov 1892, ArdDA.

¹²⁴ Slattery to James Hurley, Thurles, 24 July 1854, CDA.

¹²⁵ Ed. Mockler to Slattery, Knockavella, 28 July 1854, CDA.

correspondence with him and that the P.P. was to carry out the instructions conveyed to him through Rev. James Howley of Thurles.¹²⁶

Another parish in Cashel where the curates were confronted with similar problems was Kilcommon, where Daniel Lanigan was parish priest. The diarist, James O'Carroll, speaks of Kilcommon as being "up hill and down hollow" and he describes it as a most unwholesome place where the mountains were almost always covered in fog. He then offers the information that Lanigan had three sisters, a brother and two nieces living with him. To which O'Carroll adds these wry comments: "...and as a farm is always given to whatever P.P. is there, it would be no easy matter to find a place to suit him and his *posse of pettycoats*. One and all they are quite vain of their would-be importance - silly in fact, while others are sneering at them".¹²⁷

The presence in the parochial house in Saggart in Dublin in 1874 of members of the parish priest's family and the conduct of the curate's servant became focal points in a row that erupted between the two priests. The P.P., Thomas MacCormick, had reported the curate, John Reynolds, for allegedly neglecting certain duties and for the conduct of his female servant. On hearing that the P.P. had received a reply from Paul Cullen, Reynolds was reported to have said to MacCormick: "You're an inhuman brute, were you not often sick yourself? What duties did I neglect? You neglected more yourself than I did. You must have been in a drivelling mood when you penned this letter... every word of which I will prove to be false". Reynolds refused to let the offending servant go and MacCormick then said that it was better to refer the matter to the diocesan authorities. "Of course", the P.P. continued, "Your Eminence will see that Fr. Reynolds and I cannot remain much longer in the same boat ". As regards the charge that he himself was guilty of neglect of duty, MacCormick dismissed this as "the common weapon of the self convicted". He defended himself against the charge by saying that he had only missed mass on two or three occasions due to sickness, which he believed was brought on "from heartrending anxiety.. on account of this poor man's state". He concluded by stating that he had not seen the signs of drink on Reynolds "although I confess I could not but have had my own thoughts on the matter".¹²⁸

"In self defence, I feel called upon to address your Eminence on the anomalous position in which I find myself placed and the insincerity of my parish priest *sua sponte* ". Thus Reynolds began his reply to MacCormick's charges. The P.P. had said that Reynolds could not feel "free or happy" as at present situated. To which Reynolds

¹²⁶ Slattery to Mockler, (copy of reply written on back of above), CDA.

¹²⁷ Diary of James O'Carroll, 9 April 1862, CDA.

¹²⁸ T. MacCormick to Cullen, Saggart, Wednesday [1874], DDA.

replied that he could not feel happy while he saw the priests' house "made the lodging of two fashionable ladies, who, if they could, would arrange anything or nothing at all for the unfortunate curate who might happen to live in the house with them". He stated that his predecessor had often been forced to go to a parishioner's house "to get his chop or his steak" while the servant of the house was waiting on "my ladies Rigney". He then told a story of how, while on a visit in the parish, he was asked, "How was the P.P. and his family?" and this was followed by laughter. He had heard Mrs. Rigney called Mrs. McCormick and, said Reynolds, "it is really anything but edifying to see Fr. McCormick constantly walking and driving about with his sister and niece and their little lap-dog". "This practice appears to constitute his first and principal obligation" was the curate's caustic comment. Reynolds then described the manner in which rooms in the house were allocated, the P.P. and his family having the bigger rooms while the curate had no place for his boy - "a necessity that I cannot get over". Reynolds suggested that the house be divided differently and that the curate have a separate entrance. Referring to his servant and McCormick's allegation that she was a drunkard, Reynolds responded, "*Toto coelo* I deny that". Refuting any suggestions that there might be any improper relationship with the servant, he described her as "a widow of middle age and of rather repulsive appearance". He could also furnish testimonials from other priests as to her character. He then proposed: "..let Mrs. Rigney get her own servant; let me keep mine. I should be immolated without her". Finally, as regards the charges of neglect of duty, Reynolds undertook to disprove the charges whenever the Cardinal wished him to do so. He was hopeful that the Cardinal in his wisdom would "see through the diplomacy of Fr. McCormick, which has for its end the converting of the parochial house into a family residence".¹²⁹

The parish priest, MacCormick, followed up his previous letters with further complaints, giving instances of occasions when Reynolds had either been late or absent altogether. "I think too, your Eminence, of my having to despair on this servant, whom he said he would not allow to go away and who was drunk twice since she came here", he wrote. The P.P.'s proposal was that Reynolds should be made to answer the various charges "in public council before the Vicars..." and then he was confident that Cullen would see "how his *braggadino* way of sweeping away all the charges on oath will end - I have not written or said one word that will not bear the light of day".¹³⁰ There was no reference made to MacCormick being called upon to answer the curate's allegations of the parochial house being turned into a family residence.

¹²⁹ John Reynolds to Cullen, Sagart, 20 Dec 1874, DDA.

¹³⁰ T. MacCormick to Cullen, Sunday [1874], DDA.

Neglect of Duty

The charge of neglect of duty which was made by McCormick against his curate is one that occurs frequently in diocesan correspondence. Generally, the charge is levelled against curates by parish priests but it cannot always be taken at face value. Occasionally, the complaints amount to a straightforward expression of dissatisfaction with the manner in which a curate is performing his parish duties. More often, the charges serve to cloak the real problem - the disharmony existing within the presbytery. In this way, the parish priest's dislike of his curate is translated into complaints about neglect of duty. It does not necessarily mean that there was a lack of zeal or a serious lack of competence prevalent among the junior clergy, even if one takes into account criticisms by such eminent clerics as Paul Cullen, who, in a letter to his friend Kirby in Rome in 1876, had this to say: "The defect of many young priests is that they do their obvious duties only. They say Mass and hear confessions but no more. When the parish priest asks the curate to do something not mentioned in the statutes the answer will be 'I am not bound' - the constitutional way of acting in our times, opposition within the law".¹³¹ The latter comment was, of course, a reference to parliamentary policies and practices like obstructionism being advocated just then.

As already pointed out, curates were at a disadvantage in that, unlike P.P's, they could be transferred at will and without notice. One thing that emerges clearly from diocesan correspondence is the sense of grievance felt by many of the junior clergy because of the refusal of their superiors to inform them of charges brought against them. This sense of grievance was heightened when they were suddenly removed from a parish without any consultation or discussion. The point was made by two young priests to Cullen in the early 1850's. One, James Fitzpatrick, a curate in Dalkey, wanted to know what the charges against him were and why he was no longer wanted as a priest in the parish. "The request, my Lord, is a very rational one", he wrote, "and if refused to me I shall consider myself very uncharitably, very harshly and very unjustly treated".¹³² Fitzpatrick was moved to Maynooth, an appointment which he saw as demotion, and in retrospect, he also complained bitterly that, from the time of his arrival in Dalkey in 1846, he had had to exist on thirty shillings a week.¹³³

In similar vein, Francis Faulkner replied to what he called "a most extraordinary letter" from Cullen. He had visited the archbishop as arranged but Cullen was absent.

¹³¹ Paul Cullen to Kirby, 17 Dec 1876, Kirby papers, *Arch. Hib.*, xxxi, 1973.

¹³² James Fitzpatrick to Cullen, Dalkey, 20 Jan 1853, DDA.

¹³³ James Fitzpatrick to Cullen, Dalkey 1853, DDA.

Faulkner now wished to know why he was being punished and he asked if he had done anything wrong or if he had neglected any duty.¹³⁴ He resigned his chaplaincies as requested but he wrote again to ask that there be "the fullest and most searching investigation" into any charges made against him. "My Lord", he pleaded, "the mental agony I have endured since last Good Friday cannot be described. I implore of your Grace not to leave me any longer in this afflicted state of mind but give me... an opportunity of proving my innocence of a foul charge.."¹³⁵

Not at all as assertive or as emotional was James MacVeigh, curate in St. Michan's parish, whose parish priest complained that MacVeigh had missed out on two masses without any explanation. MacVeigh, who was described as "a sad oddity" by the P.P., replied meekly that even since he was a child, he had placed himself in the Cardinal's hands and would now continue to do so.¹³⁶

There was a twist in the story involving Michael Mullally of Francis St. parish in that, this time, it was a parish priest who had to answer charges of neglect brought by a curate against him. Mullally was accused of general neglect of the parish and, in particular, of the sick. The P.P.'s defence, as so often before, was to attack his accuser, a Fr. Behan, who had sent a four page document to the vicar general, Monsignor McCabe. Mullally accused Behan of being bad-tempered and he instanced some cases of neglect on the curate's part. He also accused Behan of being sympathetic to Fenianism. For his own part, the parish priest pleaded ill health.¹³⁷ This may well have been the case as, two years later, what is probably the shortest letter in the Dublin diocesan archives comes from Michael Mullally. It states simply: "I resign".¹³⁸ Following his retirement, Mullally could not resist writing to complain about his successor's administration. Describing his manner as "capricious", he objected to the "peculiar style of communion inside the rails" and the banners "floating from the organ gallery and allowed to remain there for months".¹³⁹

Such was the atmosphere in the presbytery in Wicklow town in the late 1870's that the parish priest, George Harold, and the curate, Michael Murphy, took to expressing their differences in writing. Harold wrote to Murphy to take him to task for missing vespers and "amusing himself through the country" when he should have been

¹³⁴ F. Faulkner to Cullen, 3 North Cumberland Place, Phibsborough, 19 April 1862, DDA.

¹³⁵ F. Faulkner to Cullen, 3 North Cumberland Place, Phibsborough, 14 May 1862, DDA.

¹³⁶ Jas. MacVeigh to Cullen, St. Michan's, North Anne St., 29 July 1874, DDA.

¹³⁷ M. Mullally to McCabe, Francis St., 23 Jan 1876, DDA.

¹³⁸ M. Mullally to McCabe, Francis St., 8 March 1878, DDA.

¹³⁹ M. Mullally to McCabe, Wharf Road, 14 May 1878, DDA.

conducting the service. "Upon what principle I should like to know are you seeking to have an exceptional position in the parish", Harold asked and he accused Murphy of "studiously ignoring every parochial arrangement" during Lent and acting as if the affairs of the parish had nothing to do with him. He was writing now to Murphy in case the curate should think that these "irregularities" were being ignored.¹⁴⁰

This provoked an immediate reply from Murphy, who excused himself from vespers on the grounds that he had already said two late masses and preached one sermon. He denied the charge of "amusing" himself through the country and he remarked that his amusement never encroached on his priestly duties. Meeting sarcasm with sarcasm, he thanked Harold for "the exceptional position" he enjoyed and he assured the P.P. that the affairs of the parish concerned him very much. He preferred, he said, to ignore the remainder of Harold's letter.¹⁴¹

The very next day, the parish priest responded, accusing Murphy of neglecting Lenten duties, some of which he detailed. "With regard to your excuse about Sunday", he responded, "I feel you must have been amused about it yourself". He then said that he was sorry to have to mention these things, that there had always been happy relations there and that he, the P.P., had done nothing to disturb them. "You force, however, a battle upon me... For God's sake, put an end to all this state of things" were his parting words to his curate.¹⁴²

This brought another curt and sarcastic reply from Murphy, who opened with "Even I had taste - I have no time to answer in kind your long letter". Harold had spoken of a battle being forced on him but Murphy wanted to know, "Who went through the Deanery publishing that I insulted him?". Then he added: "I did not declare war and the Conqueror may rue the day on which he decided to follow the guidance of his mushroom friends". Murphy resented the motive attributed to him "in the guidance" of his duties and he declared trenchantly, "When my superiors may deem fit to alter my mission - I shall cheerfully go where they commend and neither means nor censures from the C.O.'s table shall ever turn me from the essential duties of the parish in which I may be employed".¹⁴³

When it was obvious to him that Murphy was not overawed and was prepared to fight his corner, Harold brought the case to a higher court. He wrote to McCabe,

¹⁴⁰ Geo. Harold to Murphy, The Abbey, Wicklow, 15 April 1878, DDA.

¹⁴¹ Michael Murphy to Harold, Bayview, 15 April 1878, DDA.

¹⁴² Geo. Harold to Murphy, The Abbey, Wicklow, 16 April 1878, DDA.

¹⁴³ M. Murphy to Harold, Bayview, 16 April 1878, DDA.

enclosing all the correspondence. He informed McCabe that Murphy had appeared at vespers the day before for the first time after a long absence, looking as if "he were beginning to think he had gone too far" - a description that certainly does not seem to fit the unyielding curate who had written the enclosed letters.¹⁴⁴ McCabe resolved the dispute by transferring Murphy to Lusk.¹⁴⁵

In the case of M.A. Fricker, parish priest of Rathmines, Dublin and his curate, Thomas Byrne, it would appear that neglect of duty was the pretext to be rid of a curate that the P.P. did not like or want in the parish. The initial complaints against Byrne were that he was "most unsatisfactory" and that he was always "trying to do as little" as he could. Fricker requested Archbishop Walsh to send him a good worker in place of Byrne.¹⁴⁶

It seems that the archbishop's response to this was to ask Fricker to produce more substantial evidence, so that Byrne could be charged with gross neglect. When so requested, Fricker backed off, saying that he would not dream of charging Byrne "with such gross neglect as would remove him from the work of the curacy". Fricker then accused Byrne of having done "next to nothing" when he was curate in Harold's Cross, adding that "he was scarcely ever in the place". He went on to generalise about Byrne's performance in Rathmines, calling him lazy and referring to the "whimsical way he celebrates Mass... ". He also accused the curate of having made blunders in marriage cases, which he included in the general category of "these and many others too numerous to trouble" the archbishop with. Fricker then proposed that the archbishop might send for the two of them and when Walsh heard what he had to say, he might make Byrne "change his lazy and irregular way of doing what he thinks is his duty".¹⁴⁷ When this proposal was not acted upon, Fricker returned to the attack the following month, with another letter to Walsh in which he repeated the same vague charges about Byrne's performance of his duties.¹⁴⁸

The reply from Byrne when it came was surprisingly mild and conciliatory. He saw himself as one who had always tried to live in peace and harmony and he asked the archbishop to effect a reconciliation between Fricker and himself.¹⁴⁹ The archbishop clearly was not happy with such a general reply and wanted more detailed answers to

¹⁴⁴ Geo. Harold to McCabe, The Abbey, Wicklow, 6 May 1878, DDA.

¹⁴⁵ Irish Catholic Directory 1879.

¹⁴⁶ M. A. Fricker to Walsh, Presbytery, Rathmines, 16 Jan 1891, DDA.

¹⁴⁷ M. A. Fricker to Walsh, Presbytery, Rathmines, 18 Jan 1891, DDA.

¹⁴⁸ M. A. Fricker to Walsh, Presbytery, Rathmines, 13 Feb 1891, DDA.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Byrne to Walsh, Presbytery, Rathmines, 19 Feb 1891, DDA.

specific charges advanced by the P.P. In a lengthy letter, Byrne dealt with the various charges of neglect made against him. As regards the marriage case and the charge of neglecting sick calls, he gave detailed explanations, backing them up with extracts from the parochial books. One telling statistic that Byrne produced showed that he had attended 193 sick calls, while Fricker himself had taken only 19. Byrne also showed that he had performed more marriages than the P.P. or the other two curates. He closed with a request to Walsh to bring about "a cordial and sincere and a heartfelt understanding" between Canon Fricker and himself. In a postscript, he expressed sincere regret for any fault there might have been on his part and he feared that any transfer just then would reflect very badly on his character. Until the archbishop had spoken to him, he was not aware that Fricker was displeased with him. "Now that I know he has", the curate concluded optimistically, "a few words with him will make all matters right".¹⁵⁰

Three days later, Byrne reported to Walsh that what he had anticipated had come to pass - "Canon Fricker and I are now the best of friends, determined to work together friendly, earnestly and zealously for the glory of God and the salvation of the souls committed to our care". Then, in the gentlest manner, he made the point to Walsh that, if there should in future be any complaints made against him, the archbishop would arrive at no conclusions until he had first of all consulted with Byrne himself.¹⁵¹

The uneasy truce lasted about a year and when Fricker returned to the attack, the target was Byrne's style of preaching and, in particular, his "political sermons". Writing to one of the vicars general, Nicholas Walsh, Fricker enclosed a cutting from the *Freeman's Journal*, in which there was a letter complaining about a sermon in Rathmines church. The writer of this letter described how, on a visit to Dublin, he had heard two sermons which were political. One, in St. Kevin's church, he praised as being "one of the finest sermons" he had ever heard, as the priest had stated that it was the right of Catholics to have their opinions and that they should differ in them. But the preacher had exhorted them "to be unanimous in the love they bore God and above all things, to be charitable". The preacher in Rathmines, however, "in a kind of assumed eloquence and thumping of the pulpit" had asked what could the people of Dublin expect "when they were encouraging insubordination against their Archbishop and their priests". The writer, Thomas Hennessy, stated that the church belonged to the people as well as to the priests and his conclusion was that the people should encourage priests

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Byrne to Walsh, Rathmines, 23 Feb 1891, DDA.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Byrne to Walsh, Presbytery, Rathmines, 26 Feb 1891, DDA.

to heal divisions and desist from "assaulting people at elections and consigning their opponents to the flames of hell".¹⁵²

In an accompanying letter, Fricker identified the offending preacher as Thomas Byrne and he said that he was ashamed of the way Byrne "went on giving out such platform claptrap about the priests and the people... ". He added that some people had left the church during the sermon and that, on a previous Sunday, Byrne had lampooned both the Protestant archbishop and Judge Fitzgibbon. "He should never attempt anything of this kind", Fricker said of the curate, "for at the best of times it is hard to have to listen to him". The P.P. complained that Byrne never prepared his sermons and that he talked "the greatest nonsense". Finally, Fricker appealed to the V.G.: "I wish you would help me to get rid of him. I made up my mind to get on with him but he is the greatest annoyance to have to deal with and I have spoken to him so often that I regard the matter now as hopeless".¹⁵³

This time, the archbishop decided to act and Byrne was transferred to Arklow. Byrne was upset at the decision, which he described as "a terrible blow". He believed that the people of Rathmines were quite satisfied with him and that religion would not suffer in any way if he were to continue as curate there. "*Inimicus homo hoc fecit* ", he quoted, asking if there were anything he could do "to avert this calamity". He enclosed a manuscript of his sermon which he hoped would prove that he did not intend "to say anything political or imprudent or that could hurt charity in any way".¹⁵⁴ The archbishop's mind was made up and Fricker wrote to say that he hoped a change would bring Byrne to his senses and "make him take a little more interest in his duties.... ". Again, he repeated his criticisms of Byrne's preaching, both in content and in style, and also his manner of saying mass and reciting public prayers. He finished with the pious wish that Byrne might improve "under a stranger".¹⁵⁵

Byrne did have his supporters and his transfer to Arklow brought at least one protest. A parishioner, John H. O'Donnell, wrote to Archbishop Walsh to express his surprise and disappointment at the change. O'Donnell spoke of the strong impression among parishioners that Byrne had been "exiled" because of a political sermon, following a "wretched letter" to one of the daily papers. O'Donnell went on to defend Byrne and stated that, having consulted his friends who were present at the so-called

¹⁵² Cutting from the *Freeman's Journal* enclosed with letter below, DDA.

¹⁵³ M. A. Fricker to Nicholas Walsh, V.G., Presbytery, Rathmines, 24 July 1892, DDA.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Byrne to Walsh, Presbytery, Rathmines, 3 Aug 1892, DDA.

¹⁵⁵ M. A. Fricker to Walsh, Presbytery, Rathmines, 3 Aug 1892, DDA.

political sermon, all were agreed that there was nothing offensive in it. O'Donnell maintained that Byrne would be missed, most of all by the poor of the parish - "The poor care little about politics", he remarked, "They look for help and kindness and these they always received plentiful from Father Byrne - and so they loved him". He expressed his disappointment that Byrne had not had the opportunity of defending himself and that he should have fallen victim to calumny.¹⁵⁶

This was followed by a pleading letter from Byrne himself, now residing in Arklow. He appealed to the mercy and compassion of the archbishop who had always been so kind to him. He did not know what Fricker had said about him but he was quite prepared to have a canonical investigation into the whole matter and into the relationship between Fricker and himself since he went to Rathmines. "But why appeal to justice?", he pleaded, "Is not mercy -compassionating mercy - all your Grace's own kind gift". He was unhappy with Fricker's parting remark to him - "what a nice opinion the Archbishop must have of you when he sends you off there before the whole diocese and you so long on the mission". He had suffered patiently in Rathmines, he said, much more than he had ever expressed. He was now asking for one more opportunity to redeem his character and he would be diligent in all his duties, especially in the matter of preaching.¹⁵⁷

There was never really any possibility that a decision already executed would be reversed but so upset was Byrne that he continued his appeal against the move. Next month, he was writing again, insisting that he had been badly treated by Fricker and that, if the truth were known, he would still be the senior curate at Rathmines. He was throwing himself on the mercy of the archbishop, asking for an exception to be made in his case. "Besides it is a well known fact", he asserted, "that Canon Fricker was the cause of my removal to Arklow parish" - a comment that was hardly likely to bring about a change of mind on the archbishop's part. Byrne feared that his health would now break down because of the winter work in Arklow. Having been born in the city and spent his working life there, he found that country life was already forcing him to use medicines against rheumatism and bronchitis. He was attempting to impress on the archbishop the particular difficulties he was now encountering in the hope that Walsh might, at least, give him a curacy similar to that of Rathmines.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ John H. O'Donnell to Walsh, 17 Leinster Square, Rathmines, 8 Sept 1892, DDA.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Byrne to Walsh, Johnstown, Arklow, 3 Nov 1892, DDA.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Byrne to Walsh, Johnstown, Arklow, 4 Dec 1892, DDA.

The case of Thomas Byrne serves to underline the rather unfair position of the curate who could be moved at will and without any explanation being offered. Whether the curate was at fault or not was not the point, but the arbitrary manner in which the decision to transfer him was taken and executed often led to feelings of resentment and frustration which the curate harboured for long after being moved. Neither can it have helped the position of the curate in the diocese with the people or his fellow priests. When reasons for a sudden transfer were requested but not supplied, it meant that the curate's self esteem must be seriously affected and that, as far as the people were concerned, he remained under suspicion of having committed some offence. Time and again the need for due process or a tribunal before which the curate could plead his case was patently evident from diocesan correspondence relating to disputes between priests.

Another Dublin parish priest who seemed to have ongoing difficulties with curates was M. P. Langan, parish priest of Kilcullen in the 1880's. His dispute with curate Joseph Wade arose from the P.P's unwillingness to provide suitable accommodation for the curates of the parish. Wade, in particular, felt so frustrated that he offered to resign the curacy. In his letter of resignation, he stated that he knew by adopting this course he was placing himself at a great disadvantage in the diocese and consequently, he was asking to be allowed to transfer to another diocese.¹⁵⁹

Edward McCabe, the archbishop, was obviously puzzled by Wade's decision as, in his next letter, the curate asserted that his meaning was "unmistakeable". It would seem that McCabe had lectured Wade on the obligations he had contracted at ordination. Wade declared himself to be well aware of them, nor was it his intention to leave the mission without his superior's permission. "I am quite accustomed now to severe measures", Wade wrote, referring to McCabe's threat to suspend him should he leave without permission. "But in my opinion", he added, "there ought to be some proportion between the fault alleged to be committed and the punishment inflicted". It is not clear what crime Wade was charged with but, in his view, nine out of ten priests in the diocese could have been similarly accused. He now wanted to leave the diocese because he objected to being made "without just cause" an example to the diocese. He did not wish to enter into a prolonged correspondence and he awaited McCabe's decision.¹⁶⁰ In protest against the accommodation being provided for him, Wade moved to a hotel and then took up residence with a family of friends. The P.P. offered

¹⁵⁹ Joseph Wade to McCabe, Kilcullen, 28 Aug 1880, DDA.

¹⁶⁰ Joseph P. Wade to McCabe, Kilcullen, 30 Aug 1880, DDA.

him accommodation in his own house but this Wade declined. "If it is your Grace's wish I will renew the offer", the P.P. informed the archbishop.¹⁶¹

It would seem that Wade was dissuaded from moving from the diocese as, in 1893, he is recorded as C.C. in the parish of Swords.¹⁶² But it must be said that curates continued to have a difficult time with the P.P., Langan. In a long letter to McCabe in October 1882, Langan registered a number of complaints against his latest curate, Maguire. All of the complaints were fairly insubstantial, including a row that had occurred over the blessing of some clay for a parishioner. The P.P. also expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which Maguire was instructing first communicants and with the fact that the curate had failed to mark the childrens' attendance book. Maguire had been "more of a burden than an assistance" to him, the P.P. stated, and then listed some further minor complaints about Maguire's preaching and his failure to instruct the altar boys. Soon they would have to prepare for Christmas and the P.P. feared that, since his own health was not good, he would be forced to undertake the greater part of the work.¹⁶³

Some years later, Langan was calling for the removal of yet another curate, Edward Kearns, because of his "too frequent visits to the convent". Langan feared that "the intimacies" that Kearns had formed there, "besides being an injury to himself", were a source of scandal to others. Langan had entertained some doubts on the subject but he said that his suspicions were confirmed by a statement made to him by one of the nuns "who begged me to make some effort to stay the evil". The curate was duly removed and Langan wrote to express his gratitude to the archbishop. He was grateful, too, that Walsh had cancelled the appointment of a Fr. Ward to his parish and, stressing the need for a zealous curate, he told the archbishop that if a suitable curate were not available immediately, he would rather wait.¹⁶⁴

Personality Differences.

There were other differences between parish priests and curates which arose not from financial disputes or difficulties with servants and family members resident in the house. There were, as might be expected, the problems of men of differing ages,

¹⁶¹ M. P. Langan to McCabe, Kilcullen, 31 Aug 1880, DDA.

¹⁶² Irish Catholic Directory 1893.

¹⁶³ M. P. Langan to McCabe, Kilcullen, Co. Kildare, 10 Oct 1882, DDA.

¹⁶⁴ M. P. Langan to Walsh, Kilcullen, 7 Nov 1893, DDA.

attitudes and opinions placed in close proximity and expected to work together in harmony. Because of this and the manner in which particular individuals might react, sometimes what seemed the most petty and trivial of incidents could escalate into a major dispute.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the case involving James Redmond, parish priest of Arklow and a most influential priest in the Dublin diocese, and Laurence Farrelly, a junior curate at Rathdrum. Redmond was a man who had exhibited some concern about the welfare of his curates but, as is evident from his many letters to his superiors, he could be an arrogant, overbearing individual. What prompted this disagreement with a curate from another parish was what seemed a harmless remark passed by the curate, Farrelly. The first report of the dispute was a letter from Redmond to Richard Galvin, P.P. of Rathdrum, a copy of which was sent to Paul Cullen. Redmond's letter to Galvin opened with the claim that Farrelly had charged the parish of Arklow with "gross immorality". The letter continued: "I felt called on to repel the charge by a reference to an official report to the Cardinal Archbishop containing amongst others the statement that in twelve months there was not a single record of illegitimacy in the register; and when the Cardinal said there might be some in the Poor House, Fr. Barry went to Rathdrum examined the books and could not find a single case from Arklow; the Master in addition declaring there were cases of illegitimacy from every district in the Union but Arklow".¹⁶⁵

At the request of the Cardinal, Laurence Farrelly presented his side of the story. He began by expressing his regret that his name should have come before Cullen "in this unpleasant way". He then gave a full account of what had occurred. He met Canon Redmond for the first time and sat beside him at a dinner given by Fr. Deighan in Johnstown on 4 January 1876. At first, Farrelly said, Redmond was very kind to him, "perhaps sometimes too much so". In conversation, Redmond made a remark about the temperance of Arklow compared with Wexford or Rathdrum, saying that there was not a woman in Arklow who would take the cropper of whiskey.¹⁶⁶ Farrelly, in fun, commented that the women of Arklow would prefer two croppers. Redmond was incensed and called Farrelly a liar and a ruffian and said: "How dare you said [sic] that of my people who are the most moral and temperate in the diocese. There is not one illegitimate child registered in Arklow for the last year". To this Farrelly replied: "Perhaps the register of Rathdrum Union would tell a different tale".

¹⁶⁵ Jas. Redmond to Galvin, Arklow, 9 Jan 1876, DDA.

¹⁶⁶ 'so called from the malt-horn of croppies', R. Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 2 March 1876 DDA.

Redmond was infuriated and called him a liar. He asked Farrelly to leave the parish, saying: "You came here to feed on my curate and slander my parish". Farrelly wanted to apologise but Redmond would not listen to him. Farrelly persisted and his apology, he thought, was accepted. At all times, Farrelly said that he was "calm and cool" and he did not lose his temper.¹⁶⁷

One month later, Farrelly attended a dinner given by Fr. Dunphy of Arklow. He was late in arriving and apologised to all present. "From the moment I entered", he related, "the Canon never ceased making indirect attacks on me. Now it was of my appearance he spoke, again it was some remark about the 'angular' priests of Meath (I am a native of Meath)". As before, Farrelly did not respond. Then, Redmond stood up and launched a verbal attack on the unfortunate curate, who asked the host to protect him but Redmond "would not be stopped by any one". He said that he would crush Farrelly wherever he went. He abused Farrelly verbally, calling him names, and "at last he added to the rest the honourable title of drunkard". Farrelly then replied that he would not be slandered and that he would report the matter to Cullen. He begged Redmond to stop and not to give scandal to the servants of the house. But Redmond was in full flight when Farrelly retorted by asking if the people of Arklow were ever accused of scuttling a ship. "I was sorry for saying that the moment it escaped my lips", Farrelly reported and the Canon's reaction was to rush around the table and hold his hand over the curate. Farrelly reminded him of the censure of the church, as he thought that Redmond was going to strike him. Redmond again called him a liar and "a surpliced ruffian". "I made no reply", Farrelly stated, "Thanks be to God I did not lose my temper and I was as respectful to the Canon as I could. I tried several times to make an apology but it would not be listened to". Farrelly ended what he called "a full and unvarnished account" by saying that he had never witnessed such "an exhibition of ungovernable rage".¹⁶⁸

This version of events was substantiated by the parish priest of Rathdrum, Richard Galvin. He was certain that not a single offensive word had passed the lips of the curate "from beginning to end". He repeated much of what Farrelly had said regarding the Canon's performance at the two dinners, including the fear that Redmond might actually strike Farrelly. Galvin had spoken and written to Redmond, saying that the Canon might defend Arklow against the world "but to do so in a parliamentary style". Galvin remarked that he had often witnessed such conduct on Redmond's part

¹⁶⁷ L. Farrelly C.C. to Cullen, Rathdrum, 4 March 1876, DDA.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

"towards some of the most respectable P.P's and C.C.'s in the diocese who ventured jocularly or otherwise to discuss or differ with him". He had heard Redmond call his curate at his own table "a cold-blooded rascal". "Tis hard to remedy a life long habit", said Galvin philosophically, "and we have no chance of meeting him socially except we bear patiently all he has to say, and this is no joke, not sometimes but always".¹⁶⁹

The indignant Canon Redmond felt that the morality of Arklow was under attack and in his letters to Cullen, he made the case: "In the parish of Arklow - 9,000 Catholics - not one strumpet - the poorest roof would not harbour her - not a bastard from outside corruption, not a single drunken woman.... And yet the wretched young priest insults this noble holy parish". Redmond was offended and annoyed that the Cardinal should require him to make an apology to Farrelly. "I insist on his apology as your Rural Vicar, if not I will report the case to Rome", he threatened, "I am not to be trifled with, my Lord Cardinal".¹⁷⁰ And the more the Cardinal insisted on an apology from him, the shriller the Canon's letters became. "O'Connell said he called a spade a spade and a shovel a shovel and I call a liar a liar, a slanderer a slanderer.... " he thundered, again demanding that the curate should apologise to him.¹⁷¹

Forcing an apology from the outraged Canon proved to be a long and difficult process. By March, there was still no statement of regret forthcoming and Redmond was still vigorously defending the people of Arklow - "there is not a more chaste or more honest set of women in the Empire.... " Under pressure from the Cardinal, he offered a half-hearted apology, saying that he withdrew the charge of wilful misrepresentation and regretted having made it. Also, he stated that he had shaken hands with Farrelly and had dined with him since.¹⁷²

"I am most anxious that the matter should end", Redmond wrote two days later but it would appear that he was most anxious that the matter should end in a way that suited the Canon himself. Once more, he replied to the Cardinal, pressing the defence of the people of Arklow against the allegations of immorality and intemperance. Once more, he made the points that illegitimate children came from all areas except Arklow; that "bad women" came not from Arklow but from Avoca - "Thank God I have the river Avoca between me and the scoundrels"; that the Arklow fishermen were not pirates and that in the case referred to, they had been cleared in court. Now, Redmond

¹⁶⁹ R. Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 2 March 1876, DDA.

¹⁷⁰ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 29 Feb [1876], DDA.

¹⁷¹ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 29 Feb 1876, DDA.

¹⁷² Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 4 March 1876, DDA.

added rather disingenuously, he was not pressing for punishment for Farrelly but only "for authoritative advice and caution..."¹⁷³

The Cardinal was insistent that Redmond should offer a written apology but the vain and arrogant P.P. found this most difficult to do. On 8 March, he wrote two contradictory letters on the matter. In the first, he said that he should not have uttered the words and that he was prepared to make any apology the Cardinal thought necessary.¹⁷⁴ In the second letter, he quickly retracted this, saying that he could not apologise without violating his convictions and "telling a lie because in my heart and soul I believe he has merited all these epithets by his conduct... ". The pedantic Redmond then produced a faulty syllogism to bolster his case - whoever says the people of Arklow are immoral is a liar; Fr. Farrelly says the people of Arklow are immoral; therefore, Fr. Farrelly is a liar.¹⁷⁵

It was now clear that the idea of the Canon having to apologise to a mere curate was something that Redmond could not come to terms with and he repeated his demand that the curate be punished "*secundum canones*". He now argued that if there was any scandal, then it had been given by the curate. "Let him who gave the scandal apologize", he declared, "As for me, I only told the truth and did my duty, I have nothing to apologize for. I can tell a lie for no man".¹⁷⁶

The matter dragged on with the Cardinal remaining insistent and the Canon having the greatest difficulty in offering an apology which he saw as a humiliation. He reported to Cullen that Farrelly was "quarrelling with every priest about him" and that he could not "abate a jot of the terms used" by him until Farrelly had proffered a proper apology "to the people of Arklow and their Parish Priest and Vicar Forane...".¹⁷⁷ Redmond was now writing at least one letter a day on the subject and almost all carried repetitions of his allegations against Farrelly and his insistence that the curate must withdraw his "defamatory statements". Then, he said: "I hold out my hand to him in all charity and kindness as a Brother Priest of the Catholic Church".¹⁷⁸

The case was proving an awkward one for Paul Cullen, as Redmond had been one of his greatest admirers. The Dublin archives contain sheafs of letters from

¹⁷³ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 6 March 1876, DDA.

¹⁷⁴ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 8 March 1876, DDA.

¹⁷⁵ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 8 March 1876, DDA.

¹⁷⁶ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 9 March 1876, DDA.

¹⁷⁷ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 12 March [1876], DDA.

¹⁷⁸ Jas. Redmond P.P., V.F., to Cullen, Arklow, 13 March, DDA.

Redmond in which he fawningly lauds Cullen's public statements and keeps his archbishop informed of events in the parish and the deanery. There is no doubt but that Redmond considered himself a close confidant and ally of Cullen and he must have felt hurt that he was now being forced to apologise. Cullen consulted Richard Galvin again but Galvin, not by any means saddened at the prospect of Redmond being forced to apologise, insisted that Farrelly was not the aggressor and that the curate had, in fact, "comported himself with wonderful forbearance". In Galvin's opinion, Farrelly could be very dogmatic and then he added: "But that is his nature and he is in that respect as incurable as his unrivalled Rival of Arklow". Then, in a strange and seemingly unnecessary digression, Galvin gratuitously listed the names of all the women who had "given birth to illegitimates" with the comment that he had sent the names to some of the clergy "who were not at all grateful".¹⁷⁹ It would appear as if the birth of an illegitimate child was taken, in a personal way, as an indication of the ineffectiveness of a particular priest's ministry.

There was no apology forthcoming from the intractable Redmond, who, on 23 March, repeated that if Farrelly had retracted his statements in any way, he would have shaken hands with him "before the company". The aggrieved but unrepentant Canon declared: "Depend upon it, my Lord, Fr. Farrelly and I have received a very salutary lesson and he will not be so ready in aggression and I will be more select and measured in my terms of defence".¹⁸⁰

Since there is no further reference to the affair, we must assume that it ended there and that Redmond and Farrelly finally made their peace. In the end, it may have been that a compromise was arrived at, whereby both men acknowledged a degree of fault. The incident generated quite an amount of correspondence, far more than it deserved, but it was a case of the fury of an overbearing parish priest being aroused. Redmond may have tried to convey the impression that it was the insult offered to the people of Arklow that had annoyed him so much; the evidence from the correspondence shows a man who considered himself personally responsible for the moral conduct of his parishioners and who therefore took the remarks as a personal affront to himself as moral guardian of the parish of Arklow.

As we have seen in the case of Cantwell and Humphreys in Tipperary, the pairing in one parish of two priests of differing political opinions and attitudes was a

¹⁷⁹ R. Galvin to Cullen, Avonpark, Rathdrum, 14 March 1876, DDA.

¹⁸⁰ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 23 March 1876, DDA.

recipe for conflict. In Cashel, the situation was exacerbated by the fact that the two warring priests had to share the same residence. In Roundwood parish in Dublin diocese in 1892, there was considerable acrimony between parish priest, James Manning, and his curate, John Hickey, even though the two lived apart. The cause of the row in this instance referred to a matter that was overtly political. Manning's initial complaint to Archbishop Walsh had to do with the holding of a meeting of the Roundwood branch of the National Federation. Manning alleged that the meeting was called by the curate to attack himself openly and that this attack was orchestrated by two men with whom Hickey agreed "in every particular". Manning had cautioned Hickey prior to the meeting but, apparently, Hickey had ignored this and, Manning claimed, had openly questioned him. As a result, the P.P. had left the chair and he was now requesting Walsh to discipline Hickey because, he said, if this were not done soon, there would be "a strong party dead against" him in the parish.¹⁸¹

In his response, Hickey stated that, had he known that the P.P. intended to preside at the meeting, he himself would not have attended. Two of those present wanted to know if there was any truth in the report that a man called Belton who had taken three evicted farms in the district had the sanction of the P.P. to do so. At the meeting, Manning gave his explanation "in a somewhat heated speech in which he attacked two members present". Matters were becoming heated when Hickey offered a suggestion but was told by the P.P. not to interfere. Hickey stated that he had not spoken while Manning was present and he concluded by assuring Walsh that "there was nothing scandalous, nothing rebellious, nothing unworthy of an Irish Catholic perceptible at the meeting".¹⁸²

A parish priest in whose parish Hickey had previously worked was consulted. Frederick Donovan reported that, while in the parish of Dunlavin, Hickey had been "straightforward, candid and hardworking" as well as being "single-minded", "attentive to his duties" and "duly appreciated by the people of Donard".¹⁸³ Despite this glowing testimonial, the archbishop still issued a warning to Hickey, as is clear from Manning's next letter. The P.P. informed the archbishop that the remonstrance had done Hickey "the greatest good" and that Manning "had every comfort with him since". Then Manning went on to complain about his latest curate, which reinforces the suspicion that the problem was with the parish priest, not with the curate. Manning requested Walsh to counsel the new curate, Fr. O'Byrne, as he was not obeying the rules and

¹⁸¹ James Manning to Walsh, Roundwood, Co. Wicklow, 8 March 1892, DDA.

¹⁸² John Hickey to Walsh, Roundwood, 11 March 1892, DDA.

¹⁸³ F. A. Donovan to Walsh, Dunlavin, 16 March 1892, DDA.

regulations laid down by the parish priest. "I am sorry to say", the P.P. moaned, "that Fr. O'Byrne does not cordially take to these and he is rather inclined to rule and regulate without any knowledge or sanction". The P.P. was confident that a word from the archbishop would cure him.¹⁸⁴

Of course, the problem for curates who were moved frequently about the diocese was that they acquired the reputation of being awkward and difficult men and so, parish priests were slow to accept them. In Cashel diocese, William Cooney gained the reputation of being difficult to work with and he was moved from one parish to another more often than was usual. James O'Carroll told how Cooney was moved from Holycross to Clonoulty in 1853 against the wishes of the P.P. of Clonoulty, John Mackey. Shortly after Cooney arrived in the parish, Mackey went to Archbishop Slattery and told him that he would not allow Cooney into his house. O'Carroll reports that this led to a very animated dispute, during which both men struck the table, and "after spending quarter of an hour in this manner, a calm set in which led to their parting on rather friendly terms". The archbishop promised to remove Cooney at the first opportunity. When Laurence Power, P.P. Killbenny, died in January 1855, Mackey immediately wrote to the archbishop reminding him of his promise to remove Cooney and requesting O'Carroll as a curate. Both requests were granted and Cooney was moved to Newport where he survived for four years.¹⁸⁵ Nor was Cooney on friendly terms with Slattery's successor, T. W. Croke. The dislike was mutual and Cooney was described by Croke as "rough, big and uncivilized, though, strange to say, conscientious, sober and correct".¹⁸⁶

As might be expected, there were clashes too between curates living and working in the same parish. James Callinan and Gerald Barry were attached to the parish of Holycross in Cashel diocese. Barry, who was the senior curate, laid claim to the entire October collection. Callinan appealed to the archbishop, who decided in accordance with the law passed at the diocesan synod of 1859 that Callinan should receive a portion of the collection commensurate with the time he had worked in the parish. The antagonism that was bred between the two increased when they took opposite sides in a dispute involving the local schoolmaster, about whom there were conflicting reports. Barry stood by the teacher - in O'Carroll's view, "an uncivilised stubborn fellow" - and Callinan was opposed to him. Callinan rebuked the teacher for not going to confession and then reported him for this and other matters to the

¹⁸⁴ James Manning to Walsh, Roundwood, 27 March 1893, DDA.

¹⁸⁵ Diary of James O'Carroll, 10 Feb 1862, CDA; Skehan, *Priests of Cashel and Emly*, CDA.

¹⁸⁶ Skehan, *Priests of Cashel and Emly*, CDA.

Commissioners of Education. An official inquiry was held and Callinan was unable to substantiate the charges of neglect. O'Carroll states that, as the teacher won the case, he was insulting to Callinan and that the relationship between the two curates deteriorated further to the extent that each spoke of the other from the altar. On one occasion, one curate closed the chapel on the other. As soon as the archbishop was informed of these matters, he removed the two of them, Barry to Killeely and Callinan to Ballybricken.¹⁸⁷

There were similar stormy scenes in the parish of Dunleer in Armagh in the 1850's, involving parish priest Michael McKeown and curate Patrick Mooney. A parishioner informed Michael Kieran, the V.G., that on one Sunday morning as Mooney was vesting for mass, McKeown arrived and ordered him not to say mass there but to proceed to the other two chapels. Mooney turned to the congregation and told them that he would have to leave the parish as he could no longer endure the treatment he was receiving from McKeown. They exchanged words, McKeown calling Mooney a liar and the situation became so heated that parishioners left the chapel fearing that the two men would come to blows.¹⁸⁸

This report led to a stern warning being issued to McKeown by the archbishop, Joseph Dixon, who considered the treatment of Mooney to be "most unreasonable". Dixon was annoyed because McKeown had made no attempt to justify himself and had not even replied to the archbishop's letter. Dixon then laid down the order of masses in the various churches of the parish and he imposed this regulation *sub poena suspensionis*. "I charge you now at your peril", the archbishop warned sternly, "not to disregard this order of which I send a copy to Mr. Mooney and deposit another copy in the hands of the Vicar General at Dundalk".¹⁸⁹

The situation in which Patrick Kelly found himself in Elphin diocese in the late 1850's was an unenviable one. He was appointed to serve as curate in two parishes, Oran and Kilbegnet, but he soon found that he was welcome in neither. In August 1858, Kelly wrote to Bishop Gillooly, describing how one of the parish priests, Andrew Quinn, was creating difficulties for him at Kilbegnet. Quinn wished Kelly to say mass only on alternate Sundays and was preventing him from doing otherwise by refusing to supply him with vestments. Kelly felt that he was accepted as curate by

¹⁸⁷ Diary of James O'Carroll, June 1863, CDA.

¹⁸⁸ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 30 March 1854, ArmDA.

¹⁸⁹ Joseph Dixon to Rev. M. McKeown, P.P., Armagh, 31 March 1854, (copy), ArmDA.

both parish priests, Mulrenan and Quinn, or, hopefully, that Quinn would come round to accepting him after a time.¹⁹⁰

In an attempt to establish the position of the curate in the two parishes, Gillooly sent Kelly specific instructions with regard to his duties and his salary. The instructions were quite detailed and included lists of mass times, confessional duties, instructions to be given in the churches and schools, the parish stations, visitation and other duties. Kelly was advised to commence a collection for the building of a new chapel and his yearly payments as curate were determined. There were instructions too regarding sick calls and Kelly was advised that, before undertaking any of these tasks, he should consult and seek permission from the parish priest and, if this was refused, then Kelly was to inform the bishop immediately.¹⁹¹ Apart from the particular issues involved, the document contains a clear outline of the duties that curates were expected to undertake.

The difficulties with Quinn continued and Kelly reported that once more he was refused a loan of vestments for the chapel of ease. Quinn was opposed to the idea of building another chapel in his district and those waiting for mass at the schoolhouse were told to attend some other chapel. Quinn was going "to the sea" for a few weeks and he expected Kelly to provide mass at the monastery and the chapel. The beleaguered curate expressed the hope that Gillooly would keep him "as clearly as possible out of a row with Father Quinn".¹⁹²

A month passed and Kelly was back to Gillooly with a report on the latest hardships that he had to undergo. He asked to be excused from the diocesan examinations that year (1858) as he had been "very much tossed about" since he came to the neighbourhood. The room prepared for him was not just damp but actually wet and the floors were soft so that he had to seek shelter with a friend. He had remained there during Quinn's absence and then he had found a room at Hanley's of Oran to where his "wet and cold furniture" was removed. He gave details of his visits to the schools and the number of communicants at the various chapels. Matters were improving between Quinn and himself, he thought. The P.P. had consented to allow him the use of the vestments and Kelly wrote: "It is only now that he is beginning to make up to me. There was so little welcome for me once that it was only [through] entreaties that permission would be granted to announce a station in the chapel on

¹⁹⁰ Patrick H. Kelly C.C. to Gillooly, Cargins, Ballydooly, 10 Aug 1858, EDA.

¹⁹¹ L. Gillooly to P. Kelly, Tuam, 12 Aug 1858, (copy), EDA.

¹⁹² Patrick H. Kelly C.C. to Gillooly, Oran, 16 Aug 1858, EDA.

Saturdays. Now that I am in possession, we will soon be great friends until we begin to talk of the new chapel".¹⁹³

The situation in which Kelly found himself was a most invidious one, caught as he was between the bishop and the parish priests. It would seem that he had been sent there to execute the bishop's wishes which included the building and decoration of schools and a chapel. This had to be done in opposition to the parish priests and only Kelly's dogged perseverance made progress possible. He reported to Gillooly that he had gained possession of the house and was about to proceed with the decoration. He was not aware, he said, of any announcement made against him by Fr. Mulrenan and a good number of people had turned up for the stations in the chapels. He did not think that Mulrenan would have "the courage of speaking up" against him. "He is in the habit of saying to myself and to others that I ought to live at Crosswell or near that neighbourhood", Kelly continued, "and is under the impression that I must attend all the calls even at the extreme upper end of his parish but never said so from the altar".¹⁹⁴

"I am happy to be able to inform your Lordship that I at last celebrated mass at the chapel of ease on Sunday", the relieved Kelly could report a week later. The chapel was crowded and the people were delighted at the prospect of having the opportunity of hearing mass and having their children instructed in catechism. Kelly had engaged some people to teach catechism at the chapel and one man to give instruction in the Irish catechism. Since he last wrote, he had heard that Mulrenan had actually referred to him from the altar. Mulrenan had complained publicly that he had the name of having a curate; he could not tell where this curate lived but he thought he lived "somewhere down in a bog in some backward corner" and that the curate should live somewhere near himself. Mulrenan, obviously, resented having to share a curate and he felt that Kelly lived too far away to be of any use in his parish.¹⁹⁵

In his next communication, Kelly submitted a list of the inhabitants of the villages in the two parishes. He was expected to attend alternate months during the stations with each P.P. but, in fact, the two P.P's had announced stations for the same week, posing a dilemma for the curate and ultimately for the bishop. He reported too that the new chapel was "going along fairly". He was organising a raffle - "I am

¹⁹³ P. H. Kelly C.C. to Gillooly, Oran, Ballydooly, 15 Sept 1858, EDA.

¹⁹⁴ P. H. Kelly C.C. to Gillooly, Oran, Ballydooly, 18 Sept 1858, EDA.

¹⁹⁵ P. H. Kelly C.C. to Gillooly, Oran, Ballydooly, 22 Sept 1858, EDA.

tempted to send your Lordship a few tickets", Kelly joked, although it is doubtful if the quip was appreciated by the stern Gillooly.¹⁹⁶

The problems facing Patrick Kelly were compounded by the fact that he was taking instructions not only from two parish priests but from two bishops as well, as once again, the antipathy between Laurence Gillooly and outgoing bishop, George Browne, surfaced. Although he had been corresponding consistently with Gillooly, yet in November 1858, Kelly was moved and appointed curate to Strokestown parish by the outgoing bishop, George Browne.¹⁹⁷ Kelly immediately informed Gillooly of this dramatic turn of events, saying that he had orders to proceed to Strokestown by 4 December. He had a strong suspicion that Quinn had something to do with the move and he expressed his regret at "breaking off so soon from those people who are beginning to be obedient to me". Neither did Kelly relish the prospect of having to work with the Dean at Strokestown. The envelope in which the news of Kelly's transfer was enclosed had the following message written on the outside for the world to read: "I am glad you are getting a real good coat as you have a journey before you. Pat Sheil will throw himself in the Suck when he hears it but go you must. Mr. Mike Nolan told me today that you are the best priest in Ireland - what would he say now?" Kelly sent the envelope to Gillooly with the comment: "And what makes my change more disagreeable to me is that the whole parish has it by this time in consequence of the orders being on the outside of the envelope. I don't know how it got on the outside but I enclose it to your Lordship". Kelly had a further problem and he wished to know what was to become of the raffle he had arranged, as some subscribers would now withdraw.¹⁹⁸

The unfortunate Kelly now found himself used as the pawn in two power struggles, the one between the two parish priests as to who should have the curate and that between the two bishops who had been at loggerheads since Gillooly had arrived in Elphin as coadjutor. We do not have the benefit of Gillooly's reply to this latest bulletin from the embattled curate, but from Kelly's next letter, it is evident that he was ordered to stay put until he received further instructions. Kelly then listed the reasons for Quinn's desire to be rid of him and all of them were fairly trivial, such as the P.P.'s objection to the time of mass. Kelly then spoke of the work he was doing in the parish so that Gillooly would see that a priest was needed in Oran - "if I go, send some priest

¹⁹⁶ P. H. Kelly C.C. to Gillooly, Oran, Ballydooly, 3 Nov 1858, EDA.

¹⁹⁷ Geo. J. Browne to Rev. Tim O'Beirne P.P., Frenchpark, 24 Nov 1858, EDA.

¹⁹⁸ Pat. H. Kelly to Gillooly, Oran, Ballydooly, 27 Nov 1858, EDA; Envelope with writing on the outside.

who can be better able to do good than I am and not neglect the people", he said modestly and then added immediately: "Oh, but I beg pardon for the suggestion. I am sure you would not forget them".¹⁹⁹ By December, Kelly was still curate in Oran, so Gillooly had obviously won his battle with Browne and had succeeded in having the proposed transfer overruled or at least deferred. Kelly described the present state of his relationship with Quinn by saying that they were now "on fair terms". "After just a few words in private", Quinn had allowed the curate to call the list as Gillooly had directed.²⁰⁰

The last letter in this particular saga is dated 20 November 1859 and this time, Kelly is discussing his troubles with Fr. Coffey of Athlone. Again he is complaining about stations being arranged by Quinn and Mulrenan on the same day and he describes himself as "not at all dissatisfied.... ". He had heard that Quinn was still "working tooth and nail" to have him removed and, Kelly continued, "it is in contemplation to send me to Strokestown, the only place in the world I dislike". Quinn had accused him of holding a collection at the chapel of ease without his consent and had complained of this bitterly to Browne but, at last, Kelly was vindicated as Quinn had to admit that there was no collection on the day mentioned. He was working to raise money for vestments, so that presumably he would no longer have to borrow from Quinn, but he wondered if he should spare himself the trouble, as there might be no curate left there. Then, with a note of resignation, Kelly wrote: "However, till I am actually removed, I will with the help of God do whatever little good I can - no use in being too afraid of the Dean till I meet him". He concluded this last report by requesting Coffey to ask the bishop how he was expected to manage and to tell him that the people were not willing to contribute to a new chapel until a site had been procured.²⁰¹

A factor contributing to Patrick Kelly's misfortunes was that he would have been seen as the new bishop's man, sent to carry out specific tasks in parishes where Gillooly did not have the full co-operation of the parish priests. Quinn, in particular, was aware of the friction existing between Browne and his successor, Gillooly, and his strategy was to play off one against the other in order to bring about Kelly's removal. Kelly seems to have been quite prepared to serve two masters and to work hard at the tasks set him by Gillooly. What he does not seem to have realised was the depth of Quinn's resentment and his determination to be rid of a curate whom he would have seen as imposed on the parish. Kelly, too, it must be said, was somewhat naive in his

¹⁹⁹ Pat. H. Kelly C.C. to Gillooly, Oran, Ballydooly, 30 Nov 1858, EDA.

²⁰⁰ Pat. H. Kelly C.C. to Gillooly, Oran, Ballydooly, 11 Dec 1858, EDA.

²⁰¹ P. H. Kelly to Coffey, Oran, Ballydooly, 20 Nov 1859, EDA.

approach to a parish priest who was determined to be rid of him. But, perhaps, without such naivete and patent willingness to please, it is doubtful if Kelly would have survived very long in a situation where he seemed to have the worst of all worlds. In the long run, the real losers in the situation would appear to have been the people of Oran and Kilbegnet parishes, who risked being deprived of the services of a hard working curate and a good organiser.

Conclusion

In preparing to introduce the principle of 'separate maintenance' at the Cashel diocesan synod of 1880 already referred to, Archbishop Thomas W. Croke listed the pros and cons of such a move for the consideration of his clergy. Among the points listed in favour of changing the old system was one which stated that such a change would put an end to the "coolness that is known to exist between many pastors and their curates due to the substantial diversities of taste and temper and to the unreasonable exactions of the one and pecunious habits of the other". This document highlighted the main sources of disagreement, differences in temperament and financial disputes, and not surprisingly, two thirds of the priests of Cashel and Emly voted in favour of change.²⁰²

"Coolness" is not exactly the term that comes to mind when one considers the conflicts that took place in many nineteenth century presbyteries. True, there were sometimes bitter disputes when the priests lived apart but whatever hope there was of a satisfactory resolution of conflict in this situation, there was virtually none when the two protagonists were obliged to share the one residence. As we have seen, the smallest and most petty of differences between priests were often exacerbated by the physical proximity of the parish priest and curate and by the differences in age and temperament. It was in this situation that factors such as the disposition of a servant or the presence in the parochial house of members of a priest's family came to play an important part and made a bad situation worse.

There is no doubt but that parish priests often exhibited an excessive proprietorial attitude, particularly when it came to the collection and division of parochial revenue. This was a particularly intractable problem which even separate maintenance could not resolve satisfactorily, especially in the case of an avaricious and mean-spirited parish priest. At the root of the problem here was the lack of adequate

²⁰² Tierney, *op. cit.*, pp 103 -4.

legislation regarding the rights of curates and, in particular, the lack of a recognised tribunal to which appeals could be made. Even where there were definite regulations in place, such as those governing the collection and division of parochial revenue, there were those parish priests who felt quite free to ignore them. At all times, curates were dependent not only on the goodwill of the parish priest but also of the bishop. And the bishop was well aware of the rights of parish priests and sensitive to the necessity of maintaining an amicable relationship with those who constituted the power bloc in the diocese. Some bishops, who were particularly strong individuals, did make valiant attempts to see that basic principles of justice were applied but even they were often frustrated by the sheer stubborn resistance of intransigent parish priests. Often, the bishop was forced into choosing the softer option by transferring the aggrieved curate to another parish.

While disputes were frequently brought to the bishop's attention, it is fair to assume that there were other disputes which remained behind the closed door of the presbytery. Some curates undoubtedly preferred to remain silent rather than run the risk of being branded troublemakers and becoming a target for vindictive parish priests or bishops. After all, obedience was everything and curates were well aware that the rewards were better for those who demonstrated the spirit of subservience to authority which had been such an integral part of their seminary training. But there was strength in numbers and there were other curates who were making demands and insisting on their rights and, since they spoke with an increasingly stronger voice, they could no longer be ignored. They were insisting on fairer treatment, on higher standards of accommodation and living and on their just share of parochial revenues.²⁰³ There was even a situation in the diocese of Tuam, towards the century's end, where the archbishop, John MacEivilly, complained to Rome about curates exceeding their just demands and making what he called "dreadful exactions on the part of curates".²⁰⁴ Bishops were being forced to attend to the needs of their curates and to insist on the implementation of the statutes of the Synod of Thurles, which addressed the problems of curates and introduced appropriate legislation. It was a problem that persisted to the century's end, when regulations were still being drawn up to force reluctant P.P.'s to make a more equitable settlement with their curates. But, while regulations and statutes could make for a better deal for curates, there could be no legislation which provided for all individual cases. Where a parish priest chose simply to ignore diocesan rules, or where two men of incompatible attitudes and disposition were expected to work

²⁰³ For a more detailed discussion on the topics of collection and division of parochial revenue, see Chapter 3, Income and Status.

²⁰⁴ John MacEivilly to Kirby, Tuam, 6 Sept 1888, quoted in O Tuairisg, *op. cit.*, lgh. 621-2.

together, the parish could still be the scene of the most unpleasant and unseemly rows. While most priests working and living together managed, at the very least, to conceal whatever differences might exist between them, in those cases when differences could no longer be reconciled, bishops found that they had to devote a good deal of time and energy to attempts to restore peace.

Chapter Three

INCOME AND STATUS

Parochial revenue, in the main, was derived from three sources: 1) from dues collected at Christmas and Easter, 2) from stole fees or offerings collected on the occasion of the dispensation of sacraments, and 3) from mass stipends which, apart from masses for the dead, were offered to individual priests. In parishes where curates' collections were held, these too were treated as divisible dues and subject to the usual regulations.

As regards the collection of Christmas and Easter dues, there were variations from diocese to diocese and indeed, sometimes from parish to parish within the same diocese. It is clear, for instance, that in Armagh diocese in the early 1860's, the times of collections varied. Generally, priests made their collections at Christmas and Easter, but some took collections in May and November and, where there was a curate's collection, this was usually taken in March.

The timing of collections was important and they were obviously made to coincide with the period when surplus money was most likely to be available in a particular parish. Thus, harvest time was often a more appropriate time. This point is strongly made by John Irwin of Mullavilly in Armagh diocese in a letter to Archbishop Dixon in 1861. "The trifle of four or five pounds I receive as May dues", Irwin wrote, "puts me under the necessity of getting into debt every year during the summer and harvest months on the faith of the November dues being paid up, what never occurs....."¹ Irwin here is stressing the importance of the strategic timing of the collection in order to ensure the best return.

The amount of offerings given as stole fees varied surprisingly little over the half century. In general, individual baptismal offerings remained constant at 2s. or 2s. 6d. The rate for marriages was generally from £1 to £2 and funerals £2 to £3. The norm for mass stipends was 2s. or 2s.6d. in the 1850's and 1860's, increasing to 4s. and 5s at the end of the century. Funeral offerings, however, varied considerably in northern dioceses, where the unusual and rather distasteful custom of making collections on coffins at funeral masses remained in vogue to the century's end. A Dublin priest, witnessing the practice for the first time, referred to it as "about the most

¹ John Irwin to Dixon, Mullavilly, 30 Sept 1861, ArmDA.

degrading occupation in which I ever saw a priest employed".² In the mensal parish of Monaghan, a figure of £457 is listed as the amount of offerings collected at three funerals.³

In any or all of these methods of collecting, the system was open to abuse by individual clerics and, from time to time, complaints were registered about excessive charges being levied by priests. It was in an attempt to correct abuses at marriages that the Synod of Thurles in 1850 ruled that all marriages must be solemnised in the church.⁴ In pre-Famine times, marriages could be celebrated at the house of the parish priest or the house of the parents of the bride. In the latter case, wedding guests gave generous contributions of money to the parish priest or his substitute. According to James O'Carroll of Cashel, after 1850, the parish priest was still free to go to the house of the bride and receive contributions from guests or he could arrange by private contract with the friends of the bride the sum he was to receive without visiting the house. "The status of the parties and their connexion determine which mode he may adopt", O'Carroll comments and he adds that weddings were then far more expensive to the parties than they had been previously. "Few and far between", he writes, "are the instances when the priest goes to the bride's house to receive the contributions of the invited, so that almost every one asked to the wedding dinner is sure to come simply because they have not to contribute in money to anyone, except the mere trifle they give the music". Also, he claims that before the Synod, more guests were likely to stay away because they were expected to contribute to the parish priest. Now, the friends of the married couple had to decide on the amount of the contribution and "of this, each party generally pays an equal share".⁵

In 1850, Redmond Burke, P.P. of Newport in Cashel diocese, reported to Archbishop Slattery that he had reaped £20 at a wedding.⁶ Thirty years later, the system was still open to abuse, as is clear from the letter of a curate in Murroe parish, again in Cashel diocese, who complained that the parish priest had performed three marriages for which he had received "£50 - at least £40".⁷

Fees could also be charged for issuing letters of freedom and for marriage and baptismal certificates. Again, there were complaints about excessive charges. In

² A. Quinn to Cullen, Athy, Feast of Holy Name, 1862, DDA.

³ 'Accounts and Receipts received in the Parish of Monaghan April 1865-December 1886', Clogher Diocesan Papers, NIPRO.

⁴ *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae apud Thurles*, MDCCCL

⁵ Diary of James O'Carroll, 25 Feb 1862, CDA.

⁶ Redmond Burke, P.P. Newport, to Slattery, 24 Jan 1850, quoted in O'Shea, *op. cit.*, Table 4, p.315.

⁷ Thomas Duggan to Leahy, Abington, Murroe, 5 Feb 1871, CDA.

Dublin, 5s. was the usual charge for the issue of marriage certificates and in February 1854, Thomas O' Carroll of Westland Row complained bitterly to Paul Cullen that John Smyth of Haddington Road was charging 15s. "It is quite absurd", O'Carroll wrote, "that one priest should get three times as much for a few lines of certificate as would be given for the marriage ceremonial".⁸ Smyth, against whom there had been complaints previously, explained that he had made a rule that parties who paid very little or nothing at all for their marriage should, if they wanted a certificate, pay according to their means, a sum varying from 5s. to 2s. 6d.⁹

In addition to the standard collections and offerings, there were other sources of revenue available to the parochial clergy. In most dioceses, for instance, there were annual collections of hay, oats and corn to feed the priests' horses. As time passed, these collections became a tradition and 'oats money' was collected long after horses ceased to be the normal mode of transport. Thomas O'Carroll, who was curate in Clonoulty parish in Cashel diocese, tells of a visit to parishioners in July 1846 and being invited by them to send his horse to grass on their farm at Aherlow. "I reluctantly consented", he says, "and indeed would not have done so could I procure grass for payment in all the country round".¹⁰ Later in the same year, he was made a present of a bag of oats by another parishioner.¹¹

In some cases, donations of hay and oats were more than ample. James Redmond, P.P. of Arklow, talked in February 1854 about housing his curate and he wrote: "The parish is sure to give him hay enough to feed four cows and a horse. This year he will sell £40 worth of hay as he has had no horse until within the last month".¹² The custom in Arklow and in other parishes where hay was given as dues was that each priest should keep an account of the number of loads he received from the people. On the day of settlement the parish priest took half the number of loads at a fixed sum - in 1876, this was 10s. per load - and the remainder was divided among the curates.¹³

The collection of the oats money could also be a relevant factor when curates were being changed from one parish to another. This point is made by Denis Grey of Drumshambo parish to his bishop, Bartholomew Woodlock, who had been appointed to Ardagh diocese from All Hallows College and who may not have been familiar with

⁸ Fr. O'Carroll to Cullen, 48 Westland Row, 28 Feb 1854, DDA.

⁹ J. Smyth to Cullen, 153 James St., 8 Jan 1853, DDA.

¹⁰ Diary of Thomas O'Carroll, 23 July 1846, CDA.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29 Nov 1846, CDA.

¹² Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 12 Feb 1854, DDA.

¹³ Wm. Dunphy to Cullen, Arklow, 3 Nov 1876, DDA.

the customs and practices of a rural diocese. Grey pointed out that the oats could not be collected until the end of September or the beginning of October and if the changes were not made until October, some would gain and others would lose. A curate moved from a parish where the oats collection was made in harvest time to a parish where it was made at a later time would receive two oats collections whereas his successor might receive none, if they changed places.¹⁴

Division of dues.

"There never was a wiser nor a juster arrangement than to have all assistant priests [and] curates with share and share alike of the emoluments". So wrote James Redmond, parish priest of Arklow, to Paul Cullen in December 1866,¹⁵ referring to the division of dues, which, despite regulations laid down at the Synod of Thurles and reinforced at various provincial synods, was nevertheless a source of considerable disharmony in some nineteenth century presbyteries.

The basic rule with regard to division of dues was that in a parish with one curate living apart, the parish priest received two thirds of all divisible dues and the curate one third - the famous *tertia pars* ; in a parish with two curates, the division was one half to the parish priest and a quarter each to the two curates; where there were five curates, the parish priest was to receive two fifths, the curates one fifth each and so on.¹⁶ The rule did not take account of human failings and a good deal of episcopal time and energy was expended on attempts to enforce a universal and equitable system of dividing parochial revenue. For parish priests who wished to appropriate to themselves a greater portion than was their entitlement, it was easy to earmark from parochial revenue moneys which they could designate as their own personal funds.

The reforming bishop of Elphin, Laurence Gillooly, was appointed to a diocese which had more than its share of disputes between priests over the division of dues. In February 1864, "moved by our ardent desire to promote peace and brotherly love", he sent a circular to all priests of the diocese, laying down the ground rules for the division of revenue. Where there was only one curate in a parish, he was to receive one third, whereas in a parish with two curates, each was to receive one fifth; where there were three or more curates, each was to receive an equal share of the half of all revenue; and

¹⁴ D. Grey to Woodlock, Drumshambo, 8 Sept [no year], ArdDA.

¹⁵ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, 12 Dec 1866, DDA.

¹⁶ *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae apud Thurles, MDCCCL; Statuta Dioecesana per provinciam Dubliniensem observanda*, (Dublin 1831).

where there was one curate between two parishes, he was to receive one quarter of all revenue from each of the parishes. Mass stipends belonged specifically and exclusively to the individual priest who said the mass. There were also regulations regarding masses for the dead. Any priest found in breach of these regulations was liable to *ipso facto* suspension *a divinis*. There was to be a settlement of accounts in the last week of each month at a time and place appointed by the parish priest. Again, failure to comply was punishable by suspension and a similar penalty was incurred by anyone proved guilty of fraud in the return of receipts.¹⁷

In other dioceses, too, bishops were forced to intervene, as the interpretation and refinement of regulations became necessary in order to decide, for instance, which parochial revenue was divisible and which was not. Archbishop Thomas Croke of Cashel issued a circular to his clergy in 1880. He listed the dues which were considered divisible, including marriage fees, Christmas and Easter collections, baptismal offerings, offerings at churchings and blessings of clay and on the feast of All Souls, curates' collections and offerings from corpse masses. Again he insisted on the normal ratio of divisions as applicable.¹⁸

Despite the ongoing efforts of the bishops, there were still abuses and complaints and, as late as 1885, the bishops of the province of Tuam passed resolutions dealing with the equitable distribution of revenue. John MacEvelly, archbishop of Tuam, in a letter to Tobias Kirby in Rome, complained about curates exacting more than their entitlement - a somewhat ironic twist to the usual pattern. MacEvelly stated that these resolutions were being passed "in order to put a stop to flagrant abuses and dreadful exactions on the part of curates..." and he spoke of the necessity to put an end to the "cruel exactions of curates in making their collections against which the people were actually rebelling". These resolutions opened by stressing the prohibition against exacting dues unfairly. Interestingly here, up to this time, the norm for division laid down in a parish with one curate states that, after expenses had been deducted, one half went to the curate and the other to the parish priest. In parishes with two curates, the P.P. was to receive one third and curates one third each and, where there were three curates, each priest was to receive one quarter of the revenue after deducting expenses.¹⁹

¹⁷ Handwritten document, signed +L. Gillooly, 6 Feb 1864, EDA.

¹⁸ Circular to clergy of Cashel and Emly, T.W. Croke, 25 Dec 1880, CDA.

¹⁹ John MacEvelly to Kirby, Tuam, 6 Sept 1888, quoted in Padraig O Tuairisg, *op.cit.*, lgh. 621-2.

MacEvilly says that he was slow in enforcing the provincial arrangements but that the parish priests of the diocese had requested him in writing "to apply a remedy to the abnormal state of things", where curates had been in receipt of revenues nearly equal to those of parish priests. "This was certainly an anomalous state of things and peculiar to this Diocese", he continued, "The parish priests had heavy expenses to meet and no such state of things existed in any other Diocese of Ireland". He then stated that there were no objections except from two curates, Mathias Lavelle of Roundstone, "the terror of parish priests", and Peter MacPhilpin, a well known Land League activist and persistent opponent of MacEvilly. The archbishop then claimed that MacPhilpin was seeking to "foment rebellion among the curates at the last retreat" but that he had failed with most of them. MacPhilpin had written to MacEvilly objecting to the new arrangements and threatening to make them public. He had also appealed to Rome and MacEvilly requested Kirby to ensure that the curate's appeal was not received there. "I am acting within my canonical rights", MacEvilly declared pompously, "as I am securing a decent right for every curate. I would therefore respectfully ask his Eminence with his well known zeal for order and discipline to put a stop, if appealed to, to the vagaries of this rebellious priest, MacPhilpin, who is a formentor of discontent among the junior clergy".²⁰

Parochial revenue.

In 1861, Archbishop Patrick Leahy of Cashel produced an estimate of the relative wealth of Irish parishes with a view to collecting a levy from each parish for the support of the Catholic University.²¹ There is no way of knowing what the basis for Leahy's estimate was but the figures given here indicate the amount of the proposed levy per parish in the 28 dioceses. The figures also demonstrate Leahy's own view of the relative wealth of the dioceses and that is in itself of considerable interest and significance.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Proposed Expenditure on the Catholic University, Leahy Papers, 1 April 1861, quoted in Desmond J. Keenan, **The Catholic Church in Nineteenth Century Ireland**, (Dublin 1983), pp. 228-9

Table 4

Proposed levy on parishes based on the estimate of Archbishop Patrick Leahy of Cashel, 1861.

Province of:

Armagh		Cashel		Dublin		Tuam	
Ardagh	£6	Cashel	£8	Dublin	£20	Achonry	£3
Armagh	£6	Cloyne	£8	Ferns	£6	Clonfert	£5
Clogher	£5	Cork	£8	Kildare	£6	Elphin	£5
Down & Connor	£4	Kerry	£5	Ossory	£7	Galway	£5
Derry	£3	Killaloe	£6			Killala	£3
Dromore	£4	Limerick	£8			Kilmacduagh &	£5
						Kilfenora	
Kilmore	£5	Ross	£5			Tuam	£5
Meath	£10	Waterford	£7				
Raphoe	£3						

What Leahy is attempting here is to arrive at an average levy appropriate for the parishes of each diocese. Within an individual diocese, Dublin for instance, there would have been considerable discrepancies between the revenue of individual parishes. City parishes such as St. Joseph's Berkeley Road could boast of very comfortable livings indeed, as in 1890, receipts for this particular parish showed a gross income of £1410²² while in the same year, the accounts for Rathfarnham parish show divisible dues of £1298.²³ Kingstown was worth £765 to the incumbent in 1892²⁴; St. Paul's Arran Quay was worth £1379 in 1893²⁵, while Aughrim St. had an income of £956.²⁶ At the other extreme, the parish priest of Enniskerry, a rural parish which had suffered from a period of mismanagement, was sending out distress signals in 1891. He claimed that the income totalled £200 per annum and when expenses of £51.13.11. were deducted, the nett income came to £148.6.1.²⁷ Moone was another at the lower end of the scale and in 1893, the parish priest argued that, on a total income of £186.19.2, he could not afford to support a curate²⁸

²² Statement of accounts, St. Joseph's, Berkeley Road, 20 April [1890], DDA.

²³ R. Canon Myler to Walsh, Parochial House, Rathfarnham, 22 Jan 1890, DDA.

²⁴ Note signed N. Walsh, Kingstown, [1892], DDA.

²⁵ Estimate of revenue, St. Paul's, Arran Quay, March 1893, DDA.

²⁶ Aughrim St. Church, receipts, J. A. Burke, [1893], DDA.

²⁷ Charles Cuddihy P.P. to Walsh, Parochial House, Enniskerry, 28 Jan 1891, DDA.

²⁸ E. Dukay to Walsh, Moone, 6 July 1893, DDA.

Whatever the rationale employed in arriving at these estimates, we must assume that Leahy would have been most careful in compiling them, particularly if they were to form the basis for calculating the levy to be collected for a project like the Catholic University. It is fair to assume that the figures do give a reasonably accurate indication of the relative wealth of dioceses in the early 1860's.

Table 5

Examples of parish income 1852-1898

Year	Dublin	Cashel/Raphoe	Ardagh	Clogher
1852		Kilmoyler £120		
1854	Celbridge £219 (£100)*	Ballinahinch £210		
1855		Ballinahinch £277		
1862		Hospital (£120)*		
1863	Ballymore Eustace £223 (£140)*	Thurles (£200)*		
1864	Wicklow £156 (collections only) (£200)* St. Audeons £860 (£140)*			
1865				Monaghan £196 (April - Dec)
1866	Rathdrum £530 (£100)*			Monaghan £488 (£100)*
1867				Monaghan £346
1868				Monaghan £541
1869				Monaghan £442
1870				Monaghan £582
1871		Murroe £402 (£120)*		Monaghan £464
1872				Monaghan £406
1873			Killenummery £486 (£92)*	Monaghan £322
1874		Mevagh £301	Killenummery £338	Monaghan £326
1875	St. Audeons £227 (collections only)	Killymard £188	Killenummery £382	Monaghan £427
1876			Killenummery £401	Monaghan £432
1877			Killenummery £389 Rynagh & Gallen £547 (£80)*	Monaghan £635
1878	St. Audeons £142 (collections only)	Kilmacrenan £279	Killenummery £475 Rynagh & G £564	Monaghan £425
1879			Killenummery £348 Rynagh & G £496	Monaghan £633
1880			Killenummery £336 Rynagh & G £455	Monaghan £616

1881			Killenummery £283 Ballintogher £390	Monaghan £552
1882		Thurles £379 (cathedral)		Monaghan £562
1883				Monaghan £562
1884				Monaghan £593
1885	Dunlavin £424 (£180)*			Monaghan £571
1886	Arran Quay £1900 (£150)*			Monaghan £571
1887			Karra £177 (£95)*	
1888	Arklow £356 (£150)*			
1889	Celbridge £396 (£100)*		Drumlish £260	
1890	Castledermot (£200)* £400 Berkeley Rd. £1410 Rathfarnham (£115)* £1298		Drumsna £227 Columbkille £115 (collections only)	
1891	Enniskerry £200		Dromard £312 (£51)* Drumsna £211	
1892	Kingstown £793 (£100)*			
1893	Arran Quay £1558 Aughrim St. £861 Moone £186 (Jan-Oct)			
1897	Westland Row £313 (£200)*			
1898	Blessington £499 (£150)*			

* The figures in brackets represent the totals of income for those particular parishes for the year 1801, as listed in the Castlereagh correspondence.²⁹

Listed above are all the parochial returns which are available from diocesan archives. They do give an indication of the income in city and country parishes within Dublin diocese, as well as the income from the more affluent rural area of Cashel and the less well off parishes of Ardagh and Raphoe. Care must be exercised in drawing conclusions as there are variable factors to be taken into account such as the relative affluence of parishioners, the financial competencies of particular priests and their ability to accumulate and manage wealth and, of course, the number of families in the different parishes.

On this latter point, the detailed returns from Killenummery parish in Ardagh diocese are interesting and clearly demonstrate the effects of emigration and falling population in the 70's and 80's. This parish, where monthly collections averaged £40

²⁹ *Memoirs and Correspondence of Viscount Castlereagh*, iv, (London 1853), pp. 133-6.

to £50, had an income of £486 in 1873. The following year, this figure fell dramatically to £338 and, while it rallied somewhat in subsequent years to reach a satisfactory £475 in 1878, by the year 1881, the figure had reached an all-time low of £282. A similar pattern is evident in the returns from the parish of Rynagh and Gallen (Cloghan and Banagher) in the same diocese where the figures over the four years 1877 - 1880 show a drop of almost £100.

In sharp contrast with this are the figures from the parish of Monaghan in Clogher diocese, which are by far the most detailed lists of parish income available. Monaghan was a mensal parish, which meant that the bishop, James Donnelly, was entitled to one half of the yearly income. The Monaghan figures show a steady increase over the years 1865 to 1886. The average total annual income over the decade 1866-75 is £435 while the average total income for the following decade, 1876-85, is £558. The shortfall in income in the years 1873 and 1874 may be explained by the fact that the curates' collections, which average £50, are not included for those years. An interesting feature of the Monaghan collections is that the totals are sometimes boosted by the practice in northern dioceses of taking collections on the coffins at funerals. For instance, in the year 1877, when the total income was £635, two such funeral collections yielded receipts amounting to £140.³⁰ There are no specific figures for the parishes of Clogher diocese in the Castlereagh lists but it is safe to assume that the parish of Monaghan is one of the "four or five parishes" mentioned by Bishop Hugh O'Reilly where the income totals £100 a year or more.³¹ Another interesting feature is that for the year 1875, when a direct comparison can be drawn, the income for the parish of Monaghan far exceeds that of Killymard in Raphoe and that of St. Audeon's in the High Street in Dublin city, although the figure for the latter represents collections only.

The comparison with the Castlereagh estimates for the various parishes shows a significant increase in revenue over the century and in some cases, this increase was quite spectacular. For instance, the income at Celbridge parish had doubled by 1854 and trebled by 1889, while income at St. Audeon's in the High Street had increased fourfold by 1864. The revenue in affluent parishes like Kingstown and Rathfarnham had multiplied many times. The figure for Kingstown in 1801 was £100 and in 1892 this had increased to £793; Rathfarnham which had £115 in 1801 shows an enormous increase to £1298 in 1890. In rural parishes, too, there was significant growth. Killenummery in Ardagh had advanced to £486 from £92 per annum at the beginning

³⁰ Accounts of Receipts received in the Parish of Monaghan, 1877, Clogher Diocesan Papers, NIPRO.

³¹ Castlereagh, *op. cit.*, p.111.

of the century and the parish of Rynagh and Gallen in the same diocese, which yielded £80 in 1801, was worth £547 in 1877. Having said that, doubts must be voiced about the accuracy of the Castlereagh returns. Such neatly rounded figures have the appearance of being largely top of the head figures and rough estimates and the bishops, in responding to such a questionnaire attempting to assess the income of the Catholic clergy, were more likely to underestimate the wealth of dioceses and parishes. This is particularly true in the case of Raphoe diocese, where the bishop, in an unsatisfactory response, simply states that there are 22 parish priests and that the average annual income does not exceed £55 per annum.³²

A detailed account book for St. Audeon's parish in Dublin for the year 1875 gives a flavour of the kind of expenditure involved in running a parish. Income for January/February from sources such as collection boxes, donations and religious societies amounted to £25.8.5. Expenditure over the same period, amounting to £10.13.5, includes such items as housekeeper's wages, 5s. a week, and a gas bill for £4.17.11. Later on, other items purchased include an altar stone costing 8s., a carpet for the altar steps £1, four albs £3.10.10, repair of the church clock 7s.6d. and cleaning the organ £40.³³

There is also an interesting breakdown of expenditure for the year 1868 in a letter from John Shanahan, parish priest of Glenflesk in the diocese of Kerry. Shanahan was in dispute with his bishop, David Moriarty, over the appointment of a curate to the parish. The main argument advanced by the parish priest was that the parish could not afford to support a curate. In support of this claim, Shanahan estimated the yearly income to be "from £150 to £160" and he then gave details of expenditure as follows:

Diet of P.P. at 2/6 per day	£45.12.6
do. curate as above	£45.12.6
Support of P.P's horse	£20.0.0
do. curate's horse	£14.0.0
Wages and diet of three servants	£60.0.0
Turf and candles	£20.0.0
Fee to curate	£7.10.0
do. to Bishop	£2.2.6
Retreat	£3.0.0
Six conferences @ 10/- each	£3.0.0
Hospitality and charity	£15.0.0
Clothing and many necessaries for the house	£20.0.0
Total	£255.17.6³⁴

³² *Ibid.* p. 112.

³³ Notebook, Fr. Irwin P.P. St. Audeon's, 20 Jan 1875-26 Dec 1878, DDA.

³⁴ John Shanahan P.P. to Leahy, Glenflesk, 5 Dec 1868, CDA.

According to Shanahan's figures, the parish was running at a loss of £95, but no doubt Bishop Moriarty had some suggestions to make to him as to where savings might be effected.

The comfortable livings provided by some Dublin parishes have already been referred to and indeed, it would seem that, by the century's end, most of the parishes in this diocese were bringing in substantial revenue. Even a rural parish like Blessington could produce an annual turnover of divisible dues amounting to £499 in 1898.³⁵ At the same time, in other parts of the country, some rural parishes were in difficulty, as can be seen from the situation in Glenflesk parish referred to above. There is a similar complaint from a priest, M. B. Curry, in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary to Archbishop Walsh of Dublin. Appealing for help with the building of a church to cost £1500, Curry wrote: "...for the last two years I have had the special privilege of trying to live on £133 a year - the sum available for running my house with. The said house I found a wreck and had to spend £120 on it to make it even habitable".³⁶

There were complaints too from Ardagh diocese where the parish of Drumsna returned £227 for the support of two priests in 1890³⁷. In the same year, in Columbkille, Granard, the Christmas offerings and dues came to £58, the Easter offerings to £57 and the November collection to £26. The parish priest considered this insufficient for the support of three priests. Fees for baptisms and marriages were small and funeral offerings were going down, he complained and then he added: "There are only two persons who pay more than 1s. dues at Christmas and Easter, namely James Ginty and Mrs. Kelly, they give 2s..."³⁸

Parish Priests' Income

How, then, did all of this translate into actual livings for parish priests and curates? From the figures quoted above regarding parochial revenue, it is evident from a calculation of their share that most parish priests enjoyed a reasonable standard of living and that this improved as the century progressed. It is clear too that many P.P.'s must have enjoyed a standard of living far in excess of their average parishioner, and the gap could be even wider in the case of a P.P. who showed an interest in the acquisition of wealth and in increased status. Grousset, the French journalist, talked of

³⁵ Thomas Heffernan to Walsh, Vallemount, Blessington, 20 Nov 1899, DDA.

³⁶ M. B. Curry to Walsh, Bournea, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, 15 Aug 1898, DDA.

³⁷ James Sheridan P.P. to Woodlock, Drumsna, 11 Oct 1892, ArdDA.

³⁸ J. Smyth P.P. to Woodlock, Columbkille, Granard, 15 Feb 1890, ArdDA.

meeting "everywhere, in visiting this island" priests who were well dressed and well groomed and travelling comfortably together. "It is startling in this realm of poverty" he commented, "the more startling because the Catholic clergy have no official means of existence, no salary paid them by the State".³⁹

The parish priest of Rathfarnham could claim £412 as his personal share of the dues in 1890 while, in other comparable parishes like Arran Quay and Kingstown, the parish priests could claim on an average £300 in the 1890's. Even in a diocese like Raphoe, which has the low rating of £3 on Leahy's table, some parish priests enjoyed a very high standard of living. In an interview with Hurlbert in the mid 1880's, Bernard Walker, parish priest of Burtonport, stated that the highest sum received over five years was £560, of which the parish priest's share was £280. He estimated that, over those years, the average parochial income was £520.⁴⁰ Walker lived well as is eminently clear from his will. He died in 1896, leaving assets of £1,653. But it is the list of his assets that is interesting, as it includes a dwelling house, two fields, an office house, four acres of land, a four storey store, a rented dwelling house, a cow, a calf, a mare, three boats, eight bullocks and two horses.⁴¹

In the same diocese, the political activities of James McFadden, P.P. of Gweedore, attracted a good deal of attention from visiting journalists, who, it must be said, were concerned mostly with discrediting the priest. Hurlbert claims that McFadden and his curates were collecting dues and offerings to the amount of "over £1,000 a year and nearer £1,200 than £1,100". His source for this estimate, however, is the local police sergeant, who cannot have been the most impartial of witnesses.⁴² There is no doubt, though, but that McFadden lived well, as even W.S. Blunt, an active Land League supporter, described his house as "smart and new like a villa at Horley".⁴³

Overall, then, from 1856, when Henry Brennan, P.P. of Dysart in Elphin diocese, was worth £220 a year ⁴⁴to the more affluent 1880's and 1890's, when methods of collecting were regular and more streamlined, the evidence points inescapably to a standard of living which was superior to that enjoyed by most parishioners. An examination of the correspondence in the diocesan archives reveals

³⁹ Paschal Grousset, *Ireland's Disease, The English in Ireland 1887*, (Belfast 1986 edition) pp. 220-1.

⁴⁰ William H. Hurlbert, *Ireland Under Coercion*, (Edinburgh 1888), p. 134.

⁴¹ Londonderry District Registry Will Book 1896-1897, p. 173, NIPRO.

⁴² Hurlbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-61.

⁴³ W.S. Blunt, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-5.

⁴⁴ M. Naughten C.C. to Gillooly, Cartron Kelly, 8 Nov 1856, EDA.

that, while there are occasional letters of complaint, there are no real signs of distress or undue hardship. Where complaints are registered, as in the case of John Briody in Fenagh parish in Ardagh who claims that he has not received £60 for the past twelve months⁴⁵, these complaints are usually made with a view to dissuading the bishop from sending a curate or an additional assistant to the parish.

In a diocese like Ardagh, where, for demographic reasons, parochial income was falling dramatically in some cases, the comment of Joseph Hoare, a senior cleric, is enlightening. Writing to Woodlock in reference to a priest who was getting into debt, Hoare stated: "In my opinion a priest ought to be provided for better than in Fr. Sheridan's case, and it would be better to unite Drumsna and Bornacoola, Ballymahon and Clough than to have priests trying to live on, say, a schoolmaster's salary".⁴⁶ In this context, there is a letter from a curate in Newtownmountkennedy in Dublin diocese in 1865, in which he praises the work of the local primary teacher, Mary Davis, and states that, since he came to the parish, her salary has been raised from £16 to £24 a year, although she has a mother and six or seven children who are dependent on her.⁴⁷ John D. McGarvey, the wealthy and miserly parish priest of Milford in Raphoe diocese, required that the schoolteacher, John McRory, should pay the rent of the schoolhouse. McRory, lodging his complaint in July 1871, said of McGarvey: "He told me that my income was great; nearly £30 a year".⁴⁸ Clearly, teachers' salaries did not at all compare with those of the priests, who were certainly paid well in excess of £24 or £30 a year and who, generally, did not have any dependent family.

In summary, then, the evidence suggests that parish priests could expect, on average, £150 - £200 a year in the 1850's and 60's; £200 - £400 a year in the 1870's and 80's and, in the last decade, some P.P's in the more affluent parishes would appear to have been in receipt of incomes as high as £450 and £500 a year.

A comparison with the figures given in the Castlereagh report of 1801 offers a reasonable indicator of the rise in living standards and status enjoyed by parish priests. The most valuable benefices listed in Castlereagh are worth £240 per annum, while the lowest is in the wardenship of Galway at £15 per annum. The average income of parish priests is given as about £65 per annum.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ John Briody to Woodlock, Foxfield, Carrick-on-Shannon, 24 Oct 1881, ArdDA.

⁴⁶ J. Hoare to Woodlock, St. Mary's, Carrick-on-Shannon, 14 Nov 1892, ArdDA.

⁴⁷ P. Smith to Cullen, Newtown Mount Kennedy, 11 July 1865, DDA.

⁴⁸ John McRory to Rev. J. Daly, Bridge End, Ramelton, 14 July 1871, RDA.

⁴⁹ Castlereagh, *op. cit.*, p.99.

Curates' Income

The question of the income of curates is more complex and it is difficult to establish what constituted an average income. For a start, as John MacEvilly of Tuam pointed out, curates were *vicarii amovibiles* and did not have the permanent status or the rights accorded to parish priests.⁵⁰ Until 1850, curates were dependent to a large extent on the goodwill and generosity of the parish priest but, all too often, this does seem to have been lacking. The Synod of Thurles attempted to introduce a uniform system which would be fair and, in particular, which would protect curates who were at risk and at the mercy of selfish and avaricious parish priests. The statutes of Thurles were reinforced by rules and regulations of provincial and diocesan synods. As a result, there was now at least a point of appeal for curates who felt that they were not being fairly treated. It meant too that bishops could make use of the statutes to force unwilling parish priests to render to curates their just desserts. As we have seen elsewhere, however, it did not always resolve satisfactorily the situation where stubborn P.P.'s continued to resist the bishop's best efforts to enforce the regulations.⁵¹

From 1850 on, bishops and archbishops took up the case of the curates in an effort to establish a basic guaranteed standard of living and to try to resolve the acrimonious and unseemly disputes about division of parochial moneys. In the diocese of Cashel, Archbishop Slattery undertook a survey of all parishes in the early 1850's. In their reports prior to the archbishop's visit, the parish priests were obliged, among other things, to state whether there were collections for the curates or not. Of the 38 parish reports between the years 1851-1855, only 18, or under 50%, held curates' collections. Of this 18, one parish, Templemore, held two collections in May and October and a collection at a chapel in February. The vast majority of the collections, where they took place, were held on a Sunday in October, obviously to coincide with harvest and the availability of surplus income. 23 of these 38 parishes submitted a second report over the years 1853-1854 and of this 23, only two parishes now held a collection where none had been recorded in the previous reports.⁵² It would seem that many of the parish priests of Ireland were slow in receiving the message of Thurles.

⁵⁰ John MacEvilly to Kirby, Tuam, 6 Sept 1888, quoted in O Tuairisg, *op. cit.*, lgh. 621-2.

⁵¹ cf. Chapter 2, Parish Priests and Curates.

⁵² Reports from parishes 1851-1854, Slattery Papers, CDA.

It should be pointed out that the money collected did not go directly to the curate but was included in the divisible dues. The absence of a curate's collection does not necessarily mean that the curate was deprived of his just share of the dues but it does mean that matters were left more to the discretion of the parish priest. Not all curates may have been as fortunate as Thomas O'Carroll of Clonoulty in Cashel, who reported in his diary in February 1846 that the Shrovetide collection amounted to £154 and then commented: "I was not forgotten".⁵³ At no stage does O'Carroll mention a lack of money or complain about not receiving his entitlements. On the other hand, the curate in Solohead in the same diocese in 1849 received only £20 a year⁵⁴ while the curate in Clerihan in 1854 was allowed one guinea a week and this only after the intervention of Slattery, who forced the P.P. to concede this payment under threat of suspension.⁵⁵

In Armagh diocese in the 1850's, there were complaints from curates and here, too, the archbishop was obliged to intervene from time to time. Henry McKee, a curate in Loughgall, wrote to Dixon in 1858, stating that he did not expect much above £40 for the year. "The money comes in slowly", he wrote, "and when it is all gathered in, it amounts of a good year to about £50... When I deduct from my collection of £50 the expenses for oats, keeping car in repair etc. etc.... I conclude I was nearly as well off in Lissan - my collection last year amounted to £27...". McKee had difficulty also with the method of collecting, complaining that the curate spent about three weeks going from house to house "receiving from the people promises of what they are to give him".⁵⁶

In Tuam, as has been noted, John MacEvelly was attempting to deal with the situation where some curates were too exacting in their demands. He stated in 1888 that, over the previous twenty years, curates were paid in the diocese only a salary of £25 or £30 a year. They had then a quest of oats to support their horses but now, he added, they were paid one third of the dues and this amounted generally to £80 or £90 and, in many parishes, to much more. So, he concluded, their condition was much improved, the quest of oats now being paid in money "amounting to four times as much as they received in quest when they got only a salary of £30".⁵⁷

In the diocese of Elphin, Bishop George Browne and, in particular, his successor, Laurence Gillooly, laid down strict regulations governing the payment of

⁵³ Diary of Thomas O'Carroll, 24 Feb 1846, CDA.

⁵⁴ Slattery Papers, *Introduction*, Mark Tierney, CDA.

⁵⁵ Michael Slattery to James Howley, Thurles, 24 July 1854, CDA.

⁵⁶ Henry McKee to Dixon, Loughgall, 15 June 1858, ArmDA.

⁵⁷ John MacEvelly to Kirby, 5 Oct 1888, quoted in O Tuairisg, *op. cit.*, p.626.

curates. For instance, a new curate at Kilbegnet and Oran was given, on his appointment in August 1858, detailed information regarding his entitlements. He was to receive a salary of £20, the entire quest of oats for both parishes, a Pentecost collection in each of the three chapels, a yearly donation from each family frequenting the new chapel and half the Easter and Christmas and All Saints' collections at the new chapel.⁵⁸

The list below shows figures taken from the diocesan archives and it gives a sample of the yearly income that curates could expect. It also demonstrates the variable amounts from diocese to diocese and sometimes from parish to parish within the same diocese.

Table 6

Examples of curates' incomes 1852-1893

Year	Parish	Amount
1852	Marlborough St. (Dublin)	£150
1856	Dysart (Elphin)	£25 (+£50 chaplaincy)
1857	Ballyforan (Elphin)	£116
1865	Arklow (Dublin)	£70 (+£20 masses + oats)
1888	Burtonport (Raphoe)	£140
1889	Celbridge (Dublin)	£132
1890	Monkstown (Dublin)	£200
1891	Rathfarnham (Dublin)	£206
1892	Kingstown (Dublin)	£153
1893	Arran Quay (Dublin)	£153
	Aughrim St. (Dublin)	£148

The increase in the numbers of curates and the growing numbers of older, more senior curates gave an added urgency to the need to redress the situation as regards curates' incomes.⁵⁹ There is no doubt but that the appeals from the more vocal of the curates and the insistence of individual bishops on adherence to regulations brought about an improvement in the situation of the curates. As to how significant this improvement was we can gauge from the figures that are available from the Dublin

⁵⁸ Laurence Gillooly to Patrick H. Kelly, Tuam, 12 Aug 1858, (copy), EDA.

⁵⁹ cf. Chapter 2, Parish Priests and Curates for a fuller discussion on this point.

parishes, where matters for the most part were well ordered, following the efforts of Paul Cullen and his successors to enforce the statutes strictly. In the 1880's and 1890's, curates had a guaranteed income of £150 to £200 a year, while in some of the richer parishes, their income would have exceeded £200 a year. When one considers that this basic income could be supplemented by individual offerings such as mass intentions and that maintenance was often provided free or at least at very little cost, then the conclusion must be that, by the end of the century, most curates were free of any doubts and anxieties as regards the adequacy of their living standards.

Looking at the figures in Table 6, it is understandable that Michael Kelly, a curate at Mountcharles in Raphoe diocese in 1875, should feel that he had a legitimate grievance. "There are not three curates in Raphoe, perhaps any at all", he wrote, "received less pecuniary remuneration for years and years than I did, my salary ranging from £84 to £85, the highest for years being £97".⁶⁰

According to the findings of the Castlereagh of 1801, curates at that time lived with parish priests in most places and, in addition to food and lodging, they received an allowance of £10.⁶¹ But here too, there is a vagueness about the financial situation of curates because, as we have seen, at that time curates were even more dependent on the goodwill of parish priests.

Bishops' Income

Episcopal income was derived from mensal parishes, from which bishops received set amounts each year, and an annual levy (the *cathedraticum*) on parish priests. There were also fees for banns and the issue of dispensations which were payable to bishops. From the available evidence, one has to conclude that, in the rare cases where bishops lived poorly or experienced difficulty with finances, it was either because they chose to do so or because they were lacking in financial management skills or they had problems with alcohol.

Dubois offers the figure £500 a year as the average income of bishops for 1862 and £600 to £1000 for the year 1905.⁶² However, episcopal incomes varied greatly and they did not necessarily correspond with the relative affluence of a diocese, as can

⁶⁰ M. Kelly to McDevitt, Mountcharles, 10 Sept 1875, RDA.

⁶¹ Castlereagh, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁶² L. Paul-Dubois, *Contemporary Ireland*, (Dublin 1908), p. 480.

be demonstrated by the amounts left in their wills by bishops of small dioceses such as Killala in the west of Ireland.⁶³ Unlike parish priests or curates, the income of the bishops was much more personal. A factor which must be considered is that, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, bishops were very often the recipients of bequests, both of money and property, from clerical and lay sources. Many of these bequests certainly were intended for the benefit of the particular diocese but others were intended as personal gifts and were seen as such both by the donors and the recipients.

According to Archbishop Croke, Dr. O'Hea of Ross had an income of £600 per annum in 1877.⁶⁴ Croke himself was a wealthy man, who had inherited substantial sums of money.⁶⁵ One of Croke's predecessors, Michael Slattery, in his income tax returns for 1854, gave his gross income as £600 and claimed deductions of £564.15.6.⁶⁶ Croke's immediate predecessor, Patrick Leahy, complained about his income from the mensal parish of Thurles, alleging that it was worth twice as much to earlier archbishops. The diarist O'Carroll states that Leahy's difficulties arose from the great expense involved in maintaining a large household. O'Carroll puts the cost for 1860 at £899.13.7 and for 1861 at £862.11.0. and he then adds the comment: "... but who can say how much of this was given each year for the support of his three sisters in London". Leahy's solution, apparently, was to state that he would no longer support the curates at the palace, that they should live apart and that the cost should be borne by the people of Thurles and not by the diocese.⁶⁷ It was, perhaps, to resolve some of his financial problems that Leahy designated Hospital as a mensal parish in February 1862 and he was in receipt of £100 annually from that source.⁶⁸

Bishop Donnelly of Clogher received in excess of £500 in 1883, of which £307 went to meet expenses, including £130 for carriage and coachman and £100 to the secretary, with £200 declared to the Inland Revenue. The total income of one of his mensal parishes fluctuated between £412 and £770 over the years 1866-1885 and half of this went to the bishop.⁶⁹ Bartholomew Woodlock of Ardagh, who lived frugally and the assets of whose will amounted to a modest £209,⁷⁰ received on average £42.50

⁶³ Thomas Feeney, Bishop of Killala, died 1873, left £6000, Ballina District Will Book 1865-81, p.188; Hugh Conway, Bishop of Killala, died 1893, left £5,773, *ibid*, 1892-99, p. 170.

⁶⁴ T. W. Croke to Cullen, 11 Jan 1877, CDA.

⁶⁵ Croke inherited a sum in the region of £19,000 from an uncle, James, who died in Australia in 1857. Tierney, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁶⁶ Income tax returns, 4 March 1854, Slattery Papers, CDA.

⁶⁷ Diary of James O'Carroll, Jan 1864, CDA.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 Feb 1862, CDA.

⁶⁹ Account book, Clogher Diocesan Papers, quoted in Hoppen, *op. cit.*, Footnote pp. 226-7.

⁷⁰ T.112619, Will of Most Revd. Bartholomew Woodlock, NA.

from the mensal parish of Ballymahon over the years 1882-1888 and £102 from the parish of Longford for the five months June to October in the year 1880.⁷¹

One could not dispute the claims of Dubois in relation to episcopal income but beyond that, it is difficult to be more precise, as the situation varied from diocese to diocese and indeed, from bishop to bishop. What can be said, for instance, about John Ryan, bishop of Limerick, who died in 1864 and who left assets amounting to a staggering £35,000?⁷² Whatever the source of the wealth, there can be no doubt from a study of the details of Ryan's will but that the bishop considered the money and the property as his own to dispose of as he pleased.

Supplemental Income

So far, references to clerical income have been to that derived from parochial revenue obtained in the usual way - through collections, offerings and dues. But this is only a part of the picture as there were other ways in which the priest's income could be supplemented. City and town parishes could benefit from chaplaincies. The salary for a chaplaincy could be at a fixed rate, as in the case of state institutions such as workhouses, poor houses, prisons and asylums. The chaplain to the poor house in Blessington parish was entitled to £70 a year in 1852,⁷³ while the chaplain at Grangegorman mental hospital was in receipt of an increment of £75 a year.⁷⁴ The chaplaincy at the workhouse in Celbridge was worth £40 in 1854.⁷⁵ The parish of Aughrim St. had a military chaplaincy which was worth £145 a year to the parish in 1893.⁷⁶ There were also some private chaplaincies and here the duties were carried out at a rate agreed between the house owner and the church authorities. In the parish of Baslick in Elphin, for instance, in 1858 Mr. Irwin of Rathmill agreed to pay a chaplain's salary of £15 a year for masses offered.⁷⁷ The mensal parish of Monaghan had consistent income from three sources - the chaplaincy at the asylum which was worth £65 a year, the workhouse chaplaincy £40 a year, the prison chaplaincy £15 a year and a variable fee for service to militia training in the area.⁷⁸

⁷¹ T. Martin to Woodlock, Parochial House, Longford, 24 Oct 1880, ArdDA.

⁷² Limerick D.R. Will Book, 1858-67, p.518.

⁷³ James Hamilton to Cullen, Blessington, 15 July 1852, DDA.

⁷⁴ H. Sarcom to Rev. H. Beardwood, R.C. Chaplain, Dublin Castle, 14 June 1853, DDA.

⁷⁵ James Lynch to Cullen, Celbridge, 2 May 1854, DDA.

⁷⁶ Statement of receipts, Aughrim St. Church, 1893, DDA.

⁷⁷ Geo. J. Browne to Tim O'Beirne, Roscommon, 24 Nov 1858, EDA.

⁷⁸ Accounts of Receipts received in the Parish of Monaghan, 1865-86, Clogher Diocesan Papers, NIPRO.

Some Raphoe priests were dissatisfied with the amount of the annual salary paid to workhouse chaplains. Patrick Daly, the chaplain at Letterkenny in 1872, requested that the salary be increased from £25 to £40 a year. Daly had written to the Poor Law Commissioners following the decision of the Board of Guardians to increase the salary to £30 a year. In response to Daly's request, the Commissioners agreed to compromise and decided that £35 a year was a fair salary.⁷⁹ Following this, Thomas Diver, chaplain to Dunfanaghy workhouse, sought a similar increase. The chaplain's salary had been increased from £20 a year in 1862 to £30 a year in 1871. When Diver's request for a further increase to £40 a year was refused, he resigned the post.⁸⁰ The bishop, James McDevitt, appealed to the Commissioners on Diver's behalf, describing the salary of £30 as "ungenerous" and asking for the same consideration as had been granted in the case of the Letterkenny chaplaincy.⁸¹

Priests were unlikely to accumulate serious wealth from chaplaincies but what did add significantly to priestly assets during these years was the speculation engaged in by many priests in the property market, in farming and, to a lesser extent, the stock market. As has been said, this was a time of considerable activity in the building of churches and parochial residences. Many priests acquired property in their own names. In some cases, this was done clearly in the interests of the church; in other cases, it was done in the interests of the individual priest; in still other cases, it was difficult to decide whose interests were being served. Certainly, clerics who had a propensity for dealing in the property market or for farming now found themselves presented with the perfect opportunity to indulge their tastes.

"Your Lordship must set your face against all trafficking in land on the part of priests. No priest should be allowed to take house or land without making them parochial as far as can be done". This was the salutary advice of Neil O'Flanagan, vicar general of Ardagh, to his bishop in 1880.⁸² By mid-century, the practice of priests owning farms and engaging in farming activity was already common. As early as 1831, Archbishop Curtis of Armagh referred to the "farming, jobbing, buying and selling priests" to be found "all over the diocese of Meath".⁸³ O'Shea, using Griffiths Valuation, shows that in the years 1850-52, 40 Co. Tipperary parish priests had farms.

⁷⁹ R. Routh to McDevitt, Poor Law Commission Office, Dublin, 6 Feb 1872, RDA.

⁸⁰ R. Routh to McDevitt, Poor Law Commission Office, Dublin, 9 May 1872, RDA.

⁸¹ McDevitt to Poor Law Commission, Letterkenny, 10 May 1872 (copy), RDA.

⁸² N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 22 Sept 1880, ArdDA.

⁸³ Curtis to Christopher Boylan (Rector, Irish College Rome), quoted in J.H. Whyte, *The Appointment of Catholic Bishops in nineteenth century Ireland*, *Catholic Historical Review*, xlviii,(1962), p. 20.

This represents 57% of the total number of parish priests and of these, 43% had holdings in excess of 40 statute acres. In addition, many of these farms were located in the most fertile areas.⁸⁴

The problem of landowning clergy was addressed by the Synod of Thurles in 1850, by the provincial Synod of Armagh in 1854 and again, in 1875, by the national Synod of Maynooth. The regulations which limited priests' holdings to fifteen acres⁸⁵ were somewhat successful but in many cases, the statutes were simply ignored and there is ample evidence to show that priests continued to own farms over 15 acres to the end of the century.

Among the more spectacular farming priests of Tipperary were Patrick McGrath of Waterford diocese who had five farms amounting to 61 acres; John Moloney of Doon who held 64 acres; William Mullally of Anacarty with four farms and a total of 51 acres. David Dee, P.P. Loughmore, had two farms, one of 33 acres and one of 27 acres. His farm at Loughmore had over 16 acres of excellent land and had cost him £200 exclusive of building. Michael O'Neill, P.P. Lattin, could boast of a farm of 67 acres of the best land in the Golden Vale. Most spectacular of all were Michael Scanlan of Killaloe diocese whose two farms amounted to 110 acres and John Meagher who held two farms with a combined acreage of 115.⁸⁶

Farming, at least in some limited form, was a fairly widespread and popular activity among the Tipperary clergy. William Power of Templemore supplied Archbishop Leahy with details of his farming activity in 1872. He had cattle on a farm at Drangan and, at the time that he left the parish, the crops were 4 acres of hay worth £20 and about 22 acres of oats worth £12. The grass from July to November he estimated to be worth £10.⁸⁷ Apart altogether from the evidence of the wills,⁸⁸ it can be shown that this pattern was not exclusive to Cashel. In Killaloe, Denis Moloney, P.P. Ardcroney, owned a farm and he described himself as "a good farmer".⁸⁹ Richard Sleaden, P.P. Modeligo in Waterford, owned a house and 36 acres of

⁸⁴ O'Shea, *op. cit.*, Table 2, pp.317-8.

⁸⁵ John Ahern, *The Plenary Synod of Thurles*, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, lxviii, p.7. Parish priests required their bishop's consent to hold more than 10 or 15 acres of land, while curates were forbidden to hold any land without the consent of the bishop.

⁸⁶ O'Shea, *op. cit.*, Table 2, pp. 317-8.

⁸⁷ William Power to Leahy, Lisheen, Templemore, 28 Nov 1872, CDA.

⁸⁸ The number of priests willing farms is 157 or 34% of the sample - cf. Chapter 4, The evidence from the wills, Table 11.

⁸⁹ O'Shea, *op. cit.*, *Directory of Secular Priests in Co. Tipperary 1850-1891*, p.344.

farmland, and in the same diocese, Rev. Edmond O'Donnell, P.P. Killea, purchased a farm at Kilcop in 1860.⁹⁰

Several of the Armagh clergy, too, were involved in farming. One such, Joseph Marmion, had a severe alcohol problem and in an effort to persuade him to resign, he was offered £50 a year to serve as chaplain to the poor house.⁹¹ Marmion was reluctant to give up either the drink or his farm on which he had made improvements.⁹² The farm was about 35 acres in size and it had been taken by Marmion since the promulgation of the decrees of Thurles. In addition, he had crops and stock.⁹³

In 1861, Michael Kieran, vicar general of the diocese, asked Archbishop Dixon for regulations to be enforced to curb the activities of a Fr. Duggan and he suggested that Duggan be compelled to give up his land. Apparently, Duggan had spent some time in jail as a result of unpaid debts incurred on his farms. Kieran reported that a good deal of Duggan's time was spent in "getting carts and ploughs through the parish to the great annoyance and disedification of the people". In the same letter, Kieran referred to J. K. Markey, a curate at Togher, who was permitted to hold a farm of 30 acres while the same privilege was denied to parish priests.⁹⁴ Dixon corresponded with Markey on the matter and Markey, in response, said that he had been given the land by Lord Bellew and that in size it was 25 acres, not 30. He stressed that he had no wish to hold any farm, as those who knew him would verify that he had neither the judgment nor the inclination for farming. The only reason he wished to hold land at all was to keep a supply of necessities such as hay, straw, vegetables, milk and butter. For these purposes, he considered nine or ten acres sufficient. However, there were circumstances beyond his control which necessitated his holding the land, at least for the present, and these he was prepared to discuss with the archbishop. "I can say with confidence", Markey concluded, "that whatever my defects are you may rest assured I shall never be distinguished as a farmer or grazier".⁹⁵

Another reluctant priest farmer was James Hackett of Crookstown, Ballytore, in Dublin diocese. Hackett was going through a difficult time and he wrote to Archbishop Walsh requesting a move to another parish. He declared that he was at that time "under

⁹⁰ Matthew Butler on priests, Ms. 9506, NL.

⁹¹ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 28 Dec 1856, ArmDA.

⁹² M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 13 Feb 1857, ArmDA.

⁹³ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 20 Feb 1857, ArmDA.

⁹⁴ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 21 Nov 1861, ArmDA.

⁹⁵ J. K. Markey to Dixon, Clogher Head, 25 Nov 1861, ArmDA.

a violent temptation to lose my faith". He admitted having acted imprudently during that summer but he said it was "neither from pleasure nor levity". He had tried to expedite the sale of some cattle, which he wished to be rid of, as he had been warned "to have nothing to say to such business". He had sent the cattle to several farms but had failed to sell because of the depression in the cattle trade. He assured Walsh that he had not "the very least natural inclination for any business" outside the duties of his state of life and his name being associated in any way with cattle or farming was "not only accidental, but was a most bitter humiliation". Hackett's disposition was not helped by his being forced to minister in a rural district like Ballytore, so much so that he was tempted "to rush away out of the country completely never again to be traced by any human being". Poor Hackett was clearly in the depths of despair and he described his situation, quite lyrically, as being "immured in this prison, with no other prospect from my windows than the gloomy headstones of the dead; and the dark church walls, being but a few yards distant, prevent the smallest ray of light from entering". His dwelling house he declared to be "unpriestly and unsanitary" and he believed that any cleric, being forced to remain in it, would take completely to drink "of the strongest kind to dull any refinement of senses he might have". He was afraid that he might return to his earlier bad habits of "drinking, smoking and cardplaying". Finally, he stated that he was not suited to live with other priests and asked for "a detached curacy", promising the archbishop that, if this were done, there would never be "a shadow of unfavourable suspicion upon him".⁹⁶

In Tuam diocese, Richard MacHale, nephew of the archbishop John MacHale and P.P. at Claremorris, bought the Claremount estate from Thomas Maguire in 1876. To effect the purchase he raised a loan of £6000 from the Burke fund through the archbishop, £4000 from the Sisters of Mercy, Tuam, and a mortgage of £4000. The convent of Mercy, Claremorris was founded in January 1877 and occupied a house and some of the estate, which formerly belonged to 'Soap the Rope' Browne. The value of land depreciated and the estate fell into serious debt. The sisters in Tuam received only £80 of their original investment. Eventually, the entire holding was sold in 1907 and the sisters of Mercy, Claremorris, bought back the house and 84 acres for £5500 from the Congested Districts Board.⁹⁷

Daniel Kair of Raphoe diocese was presenting problems for his bishop on two counts - he was actively engaged in farming and he had a severe problem with alcohol. There was a dispute about a farm which Kair bought from Hugh Sweeney of Kilmore

⁹⁶ James Hackett to Walsh, Crookstown, Ballytore, 25 Dec 1892, DDA.

⁹⁷ O Tuairisg, *op. cit.*, I. 595, nota.

and following an investigation, Kair was ordered by his bishop, James McDevitt, to pay £31.17.3, the amount owing.⁹⁸ McDevitt advised Fr. Francis Gall of this decision and asked him to convey it to the "poor people" involved.⁹⁹ Later that same year, Kair informed the bishop that he owned one farm and a part of another. He admitted to owning a portion of two other farms but these, he claimed, were held "with a view to keeping those persons in their holdings". He asserted that were it not for "the oppressive exercise of landlord power so extensively practised in this ill-starred district", he would not have involved himself in financial matters of this kind. He inferred that, by his involvement in these dealings, he had actually lost money but, he added philosophically: "such is the return to be expected from an ungrateful world".¹⁰⁰

Kair was reluctant to surrender possession of his farms and two years later, he told the bishop that he wished to retain his farm at Tarmon, as it "was near a mail car road and near the post office". He denied that he had retained an interest in other places. He stated indignantly: "If popular custom and habit associates my name with the places where I lived or paid rent for I am not responsible" and he ended this letter: "And it gives me great pain to find the credit due to the word of a priest does not attach to it".¹⁰¹ This was not acceptable to the bishop and Kair then agreed to confine himself to the Kilmore farm, even though he was dissatisfied with being a tenant of Lord Adare.¹⁰² Finally, the bishop was obliged to take firm action and a memorandum of arrangements was drawn up in April 1874. Two of the farms were to be handed over to the priest's brother, John Kair, and he was allowed to remain on as parish priest under certain conditions. He was to abstain from alcohol, he was to allow an administrator to manage parochial affairs and he was to live on one third of the parochial income.¹⁰³

The bishop mentioned here, James McDevitt, found himself cast in the role of landowner on his accession to the see of Raphoe in 1871. In addition to an amount of £508.17s. in stocks which he inherited from his predecessor, Daniel McGettigan, he became the owner of a number of houses and property at Newtowncunningham.¹⁰⁴ McDevitt appointed a priest, Michael Martin of St. Johnston, Derry as his agent and Martin was authorised to take whatever legal action was necessary for the recovery of

⁹⁸ McDevitt to Fr. Kair, Letterkenny, 10 May 1872 (copy), RDA.

⁹⁹ McDevitt to Fr. Francis Gall, Letterkenny, 10 May 1872 (copy), RDA.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel Kair to McDevitt, Kilmacrenan, 14 Sept 1872, RDA.

¹⁰¹ D. Kair to McDevitt, Kilmore, Churchill, 5 April 1874, RDA.

¹⁰² D. Kair to McDevitt, Churchill, 12 April 1874, RDA.

¹⁰³ Memorandum of arrangements with Fr. Kair, 23 April 1874, RDA.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Martin to McDevitt, St. Johnston's, 20 Nov 1872, RDA.

rents owing on the property.¹⁰⁵ A week later, Martin reported that he had served notice to quit on one tenant called McAuley and that he intended to sue for arrears of rent although he feared there was little to be gained as McAuley had "nothing that could be seized for it". He did not anticipate any trouble from the tenant of another house as he had signed an agreement "to give up quiet and peaceful possession whenever demanded".¹⁰⁶ McDevitt was also in receipt of rents from a house in Ann St., Londonderry, property which had also been acquired by McGettigan.¹⁰⁷

A series of complaints was lodged against Patrick Sheridan, the notorious P.P. of Ferbane, who set his face firmly against the formation of a local branch of the Irish National League. One of the alleged reasons for his opposition to the branch was that he himself had 86 acres of land from three neighbouring landlords and that the farms were well stocked with horses, cattle and sheep.¹⁰⁸ Two years later, this charge was again reiterated in a letter to the bishop in which it was stated that Sheridan held seven farms amounting to about 85 acres.¹⁰⁹

Here again, the bishop himself was not averse to a little gain from his land holdings and there is a memorandum of agreement dated 20 October 1882 in the Ardagh archives by which Bishop Woodlock agrees to let his house and outoffice and five acres of land for £65 in half yearly instalments to James E. Darys of Mount Darys in Newtownforbes outside Longford.¹¹⁰

The evidence presented here, particularly when taken in conjunction with the evidence from the wills, points to a significant number of clergymen in all parts of the country actively engaged in the purchase of property and the management of farms. Nor was this activity confined to priests ministering in rural areas, as a reading of the wills shows priests in urban parishes owning a house and, in some cases, rows of houses. Peter Kiernan, a curate in Galway, owned 5 houses¹¹¹ and John A. Barry, P.P. Glounthane, owned 3 houses in Cork city.¹¹² The parish priest of Kinsale, John Keleher, had a house and tenements,¹¹³ while Walter F. Connolly, a curate at Athboy in Meath was the owner of no less than 7 houses in the main street.¹¹⁴ A sample of

¹⁰⁵ McDevitt to Michael Martin, Letterkenny, 27 March 1873 (copy), RDA.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Martin to McDevitt, St. Johnston, Derry, 3 April 1873, RDA.

¹⁰⁷ Edward Kelly to McGettigan, Londonderry, 16 Aug 1873, RDA.

¹⁰⁸ Matt Cantwell to Woodlock, Kilcolgan, Ferbane, King's Co., 15 May 1886, ArdDA.

¹⁰⁹ Unsigned document, Ferbane, 12 Jan 1888, ArdDA.

¹¹⁰ Newtownforbes parish, memorandum of agreement, 28 Oct 1882, ArdDA.

¹¹¹ Tuam D.R. Will Book June 1877-88, p.44.

¹¹² Cork D.R. Will Book 1895-97, p.114.

¹¹³ Cork D.R. Will Book 1875-76, p.152.

¹¹⁴ Mullingar D.R. Will Book 1878-87, p.149.

467 wills reveals that 164 priests or 35% were house owners and 50 priests or 11% had 2 or more houses. The wills also show a lively and active interest in dealings in the stock market with 57 or 12 % investing¹¹⁵ and any assessment of the income of nineteenth century catholic priests must include the supplementary income generated by such activities.

Conclusion

A look at comparative earnings in this period helps to put clerical income into perspective. Inspectors of the constabulary, for instance, were paid £220-250 in the 1860's, local agents of the Bank of Ireland £300-400, and inspectors of Local Government Boards £350-450.¹¹⁶ At the middle of the century, a clerk in a government office had a reasonable possibility for ending his career with a salary of about £300 per annum.¹¹⁷ From this it can be seen that bishops and many parish priests, certainly, could compare favourably with those who might be described as middle class. Curates, too, fare well when compared with what might be considered their peers. National school teachers in the 1850's earned £13-35 a year and, in the 1870's, the salary scale was £25-58 a year.¹¹⁸ As we have already noted, the teacher at Newtownmountkennedy in 1865 was paid a mere £24 for her year's work.¹¹⁹ At the other end of the scale, unskilled labourers in the 1860's could expect 7s. or 8s. a week.¹²⁰ The priests' housekeeper at the High St. parish in Dublin from 1875-78 was paid 5s. a week,¹²¹ and the housekeeper at St. Canice's in Kilkenny in the late 1880's was in receipt of £20 a year.¹²² The sacristan at Aughrim St. parish in 1893 received £39 for the year.¹²³

Comparisons must be drawn with contemporary clerics of other denominations. In his book, **The Church of Ireland**, D.H. Akenson shows that the gap between Church of Ireland bishops and their Catholic counterparts narrowed as the century progressed. In 1867, the average yearly income that a Church of Ireland bishop might

¹¹⁵ For further details, cf. Chapter 4, Wealth and Status - The Evidence from the Wills.

¹¹⁶ Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

¹¹⁷ R. B. McDowell, **The Irish Administration 1801-1914**, (London and Toronto 1964), p. 43.

¹¹⁸ Hoppen, *op. cit.*, footnote, p. 228.

¹¹⁹ P. Smith to Cullen, Newtown Mount Kennedy, 11 July 1865, DDA.

¹²⁰ Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

¹²¹ Notebook, Fr. Irwin P.P. St. Audeon's, 20 Jan 1875 - 26 Dec 1878, DDA.

¹²² Will of Edward McDonald, P.P. St. Canice's, Kilkenny, Kilkenny DR Will Book, 1888-1891, p. 247.

¹²³ Statement of expenses, Aughrim St. parish, 1893, DDA.

expect was £4526 and even the wealthiest of the Catholic bishops compares very unfavourably with this. Disestablishment, however, severely affected the position of the Church of Ireland bishops and by 1919, the average yearly income, while still substantial, had fallen to £1869,¹²⁴ while most Catholic bishops would have in excess of £1000.

The average income of other Church of Ireland incumbents fell from £375 in 1832 to £242 in 1867¹²⁵ while Akenson gives a figure of £216 as the average stipend of the Irish clergyman in 1905.¹²⁶ This would certainly have been bettered by most Catholic parish priests. The picture, then, is one of incomes of Church of Ireland clergymen and Catholic priests becoming more equal as the century wore on. It should be remembered, too, that we are comparing a married clergy with a celibate clergy. This was a two-edged sword, in that, while the Catholic clergyman did not have wife and family to support, there was always the opportunity for the clergymen of other denominations to marry into a wealthy family and thus enhance their status and income. It must also be pointed out here that a comparative study of clerical wills for the years 1860 and 1890 show that the assets of Church of Ireland clergymen far outstripped those of their Catholic counterparts.¹²⁷

There are no satisfactory indices for the cost of living in nineteenth century Ireland and it is difficult, therefore, to draw comparisons. Emmet Larkin makes a bold, if somewhat unsuccessful attempt, in an article on economic growth and capital investment.¹²⁸ Larkin admits that what he is offering is a crude extrapolation from British figures and as a result, his figure of £18.4 for *per capita* income for 1901 is considered much too low. The figure of £38 *per capita* as suggested by Cullen is a more realistic assessment.¹²⁹ This represents a 300% increase from the beginning of the century, when the figure was £10 *per capita* and in these terms, the rise in clerical incomes, except for the more obvious exceptions, is not wildly excessive.

In this same article, Larkin refers to the accumulation of wealth by the Catholic church in the second half of the nineteenth century and he argues that the failure of the

¹²⁴ D.H. Akenson, *The Church of Ireland, Ecclesiastical Reform and Revolution 1800 -1885*, (New Haven 1971), pp.320-1.

¹²⁵ Hoppen, *op.cit.*, p.227, footnote 6.

¹²⁶ Akenson, *op. cit.*, p.320.

¹²⁷ cf. Chapter 4, Wealth and Status - The evidence from the wills, Table 13.

¹²⁸ Emmet Larkin, *Economic Growth, Capital Investment and the Roman Catholic Church in Nineteenth-Century Ireland, The Historical Dimensions of Irish Catholicism*, (New York 1976), pp. 13-49.

¹²⁹ L. M. Cullen, *Economic Development 1750-1800, A New History of Ireland*, IV, (Oxford 1986), pp. 185-6.

church authorities to invest this wealth productively had a damaging effect on the Irish economy. This thesis does not seem to be sustainable as again, his calculation of Irish national income is understated and consequently, the relative proportions of church expenditure are grossly inflated. As Lee points out, little potential risk capital found its way into clerical coffers. The massive building programme engaged in by the Catholic church, while at times and in some places a matter for reproach and of scandalous proportions, did at least provide some service in providing ephemeral employment for local builders.¹³⁰

Generally though, it may be said that Catholic secular priests in the second half of the nineteenth century were well rewarded. Their income was fairly substantial, they were well housed and fed and they were figures of influence and standing in the communities in which they served. Dubois, an observer from abroad, in his book, **Contemporary Ireland**, would seem to have had the truth of it when he wrote: "The priest lives on the contributions which he receives from his parishioners at Christmas and Easter and on fees for masses and ceremonies; and, considering the poverty of his surroundings, he is generously paid".¹³¹

¹³⁰ Joseph Lee, **The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848-1918**, (Dublin 1973), p.12.

¹³¹ Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 480.

Chapter Four

Wealth and Status - The evidence from the wills.

In an entry in his diary dated 21 April 1846, Thomas O'Carroll writes: "Made my will and had it duly signed by Rev. Messrs. Mackey and Hogan - wrote a letter of instructions to my brother on the same subject - both documents are made up in a sealed envelope and carefully preserved in my small writing desk -"¹ In doing this, O'Carroll, who was a priest of Cashel diocese, was, in fact, anticipating what was to become an obligation for every priest following the statutes enacted at the Synod of Thurles in 1850² and in subsequent provincial synods. It was now obligatory for every priest to make a will and to lodge a copy of the will in the diocesan archives.

These statutes were obviously framed with a view to ensuring that the property being acquired by priests would remain with the Catholic church and to preventing such property becoming the inheritance of the families and friends of individual priests. Such legislation also enabled bishops to exercise greater control over their priests, ensuring, in the first instance, that wills were made and, secondly, that the provisions of the wills were satisfactory from the point of view of the church authorities. Thus, Michael Molony wrote to Paul Cullen in May 1874 to assure the archbishop that Fr. Daly had signed and executed the assignments of the lease of Kilbride church in Wicklow. Molony informed Cullen that Daly had made a new will nearly twelve months ago, which, said Molony, "he kept studiously from me". The reason for the secrecy was that Daly had appointed new executors. A codicil had been added by which Daly bequeathed £100 more to his friends, this bequest to be subtracted from the bequest to the church at Barndarrig.³

Another parish priest, James Casey of Athleague in the diocese of Elphin, was very annoyed that the bishop should express dissatisfaction with his will and should request him to make alterations. One of the bishop's reservations concerned the fact that Casey had appointed, as an executor, his sister-in-law, who lived in America. "I never concealed from priests or people that I intended to leave my house and land to my successor as a free, voluntary act for the good of religion for which I expect a reward in the next life", Casey stated and then added: "Although I am the least of the priests of

¹Diary of Thomas O'Carroll, 21 April 1846, CDA.

²*Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae*, MDCCCL, De Bonis Ecclesiasticis.

³Michael Molony to Cullen, Kilbride, Wicklow, 28 May 1874, DDA.

Elphin - one born out of his time- I would not I hope for all the relatives in the world bring a blot upon my memory by doing anything to belie those declarations and the document your Lordship holds".⁴

The bishop in this case, Laurence Gillooly, was concerned lest the property should go to Casey's relatives rather than to the church. Casey was indignant: "Perhaps there is not in the diocese at the moment a priest more free from the taint of nepotism". He had acted as a friend and a father to his brother's widow and family, he declared, "when their wealthy relatives did little for them". But now that they were all in America and doing well, he felt that they had no further claim on him. He then stated that he was not "enamoured of assignments" and, in the present case, he regarded all assignments as "unnecessary, expensive, troublesome and tedious, having to do with solicitors and lastly calculated to beget a disagreement regarding trustees". He added that, for many years after he had purchased the house and land, he was sorry that he had paid a penny for so large a farm in so small and so poor a parish, "saddling myself with a debt which has weighed on me almost to the present time". Repeating his intention to leave his executors unaltered, the P.P. ended: "God however has been very good to me and looking back I by no means regret having lived so humble and unsocial a life as I have lived for the past 22 years but I am sorry to be the cause of any trouble or anxiety to your Lordship".⁵

In Cashel diocese, in 1873, James Howard, a curate at Ballinahinch, Newport, wrote to Patrick Leahy to inform the archbishop that the P.P., Robert Shortt, having promised the archbishop that he would change his will in accordance with instructions, had not now "the slightest notion of fulfilling his promise". "I have no sinister motive in my correspondence", Howard felt compelled to add, "at the same time I thought it but fair that you should know what Fr. Shortt's real intentions are". Attached to this letter was a copy of a codicil to Shortt's will, by which he vested in church trustees the parochial house built by him at Ballinahinch. The house was willed to his successors in the parish for a payment of £900 to be paid at the rate of £25 per annum by the succeeding parish priest.⁶ Later, Daniel K. Lanigan of Murroe informed Leahy that Shortt had "most willingly and cheerfully" signed the documents, "especially when he knew that he could not be put out of the house during his life".⁷

⁴ James Casey to Gillooly, Athleague, 15 Oct 1894, EDA.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ James Howard to Leahy, Ballinahinch, Newport, 27 Sept 1873, CDA. Copy of codicil enclosed.

⁷ Daniel K. Lanigan to Leahy, Abington, Murroe, 22 Dec 1873, CDA.

Robert Shortt died on 5 August 1877 and, in the light of the above, an examination of his will, proved at Limerick District Registry in 1877, is interesting. His assets amounted to £1,500. Apart from his interest in the parochial house and lands, Shortt possessed shares in the Midland Great Western Railway amounting to £1050 and this money was included in the bequest to his successor. He left £130 to Archbishop Leahy for charitable purposes but most interesting is his bequest of £1000 to Paul Cullen, cardinal archbishop of Dublin, for charitable institutions.⁸ Leahy cannot have been pleased with this particular provision and, since Shortt was not the only Cashel priest to make bequests to Cullen,⁹ it is most likely that this was their way of expressing disapproval of their own archbishop and his style of administration.

Certainly in the case of one of these Cashel 'dissidents', Edward Moclair or Mockler, there is first hand evidence that his bequest was meant as an expression of disapproval. James O'Carroll, in his diary, refers to the bequest by Moclair to Cullen of the proceeds of the sale of his house, lands and effects for charitable purposes, to be used in such a manner as Cullen might think fit. According to O'Carroll, himself no admirer of Leahy, it was suggested to the archbishop that he should approach Cullen and ask him for whatever should accrue to him from Moclair's will. This Leahy agreed to do with some hope of success and O'Carroll commented: "No doubt it was very humiliating to our Bishop that a P.P. of his diocese should hold so low an opinion of him as to leave by will the disposal of whatever property he was possessed of at his death to the Bishop of a different diocese". O'Carroll stated that he himself had heard Moclair, on two different occasions, "come down hard" on Dr. Leahy for his appointments to parishes since he became bishop. At the same time, Moclair was one of 28 priests who had voted for Leahy when he was named as *dignissimus* to succeed Slattery in Cashel. "Perhaps", concludes O'Carroll, "by pondering over the opinions he candidly gave expression to before me induced him to make his will such as it is".¹⁰

Michael Fitzgerald, parish priest of Rathkeale in the diocese of Limerick, who died on 6 February 1863, was much more forthcoming in voicing his opinion of his bishop, George Butler. Leaving all to his niece, Mary Sheehy, Fitzgerald declared in a codicil that he had been "cruelly most unjustly and tyrannically treated by Bishop Butler whose most unfair treatment has brought on this present illness". And he went on: "I

⁸ Will of Robert Shortt, Limerick DR Will Book, 1876-82, p. 165.

⁹ Others were Thomas Bourke, P.P. Ballylanders, who left the residue to Cullen "for his own use and benefit" and Edward Mockler, P.P. Knockavella.

¹⁰ Diary of James O'Carroll, Dec 1863, CDA.

consider his late visit indecent and improper and request he may [not] be present at my obsequies or funeral".¹¹

The bishop of Ardagh, Bartholomew Woodlock, was another who was vigilant in the matter of priests making wills. So, we find in April 1892, Peter McGivney, a curate, writing to reassure the bishop: "Fr. Lynch is very ill. Yesterday he received the last rites and made his will. He has ordered me to send it to your Lordship and so, I enclose it. Being one of his executors, I wish to say at once that his assets will never realise the value he has put on them".¹²

In the case of Canon Monahan of Cloghan, it would appear that Woodlock was also anxious, as John Corcoran of Mullahoran wrote to the bishop to assure him that the Canon had made a new will. This new will had been made in the presence of Corcoran and another witness and it had been made "in such a way to prevent any confusion after his death". All the interest in the house had been willed to the bishop "without reserve", the value to be determined by the bishop and given for whatever purpose he wished. "I was about to insert the four objects you mentioned", Corcoran reported, "but he stopped me and said leave it all to himself".¹³ This is an indication of the close attention being paid by Woodlock to the making of this particular will and of his anxiety that the house be properly valued and become the legal inheritance of the church authorities.

The Study of the Wills

There are certain difficulties attending the study of nineteenth century wills. For a start, the will books containing the records of wills proved at the Principal Registry, Dublin, were lost following the attack on the Four Courts in 1922. This is a serious difficulty, since the wills proved at the Principal Registry were not just confined to the Dublin area but came from the rest of Leinster and from other parts of the country. Another limitation is that this study is necessarily confined to the post-1858 period, since there are no collections of wills available before that date.

What then is available? There are, first of all, in the National Archives, the large calendars, which list the wills proved and which provide basic information such

¹¹ Will of Michael Fitzgerald, Limerick DR Will Book, 1858-67, p. 390.

¹² P. McGivney to Woodlock, Cloone, Mohill, 12 April 1892, ArdDA.

¹³ John Corcoran to Woodlock, Mullahoran, Granard, [undated], ArdDA.

as status, date of death, total assets and names of executors. There is also a collection of original wills and copies of individual wills which have been gathered from other repositories throughout the country, such as solicitors' offices, and family collections of manuscripts. The most comprehensive sources are the will books from the District Registries in the Republic where wills were proved, namely, Tuam and Ballina in the west; Cork, Waterford and Limerick in Munster; Mullingar and Kilkenny in Leinster, and Cavan in the north. Again here, there are inconsistencies, as the Ballina will book, for instance, does not begin until 1865. The Public Record Office in Belfast has will books for Belfast, Derry and Armagh. All these will books contain handwritten copies of wills proved at the various registries.

It has also been possible to acquire a number of copies of wills which were deposited in diocesan archives, in accordance with the statutes mentioned above, which obliged priests to make a will and deposit a copy with the bishop. This was not as rich a source as one might have expected. Many diocesan archives have very little material surviving anyway, but even those that do, such as Dublin and Cashel, have a disappointing collection of wills. This may be because some priests chose to ignore this particular statute, and there are obvious reasons why they might do so, or they did not make wills until immediately before they died, which meant that a copy was not deposited in the diocesan archives.

For the purposes of this study, then, copies of some 660 wills have been collected. All dioceses are represented, as are all the classes of the Roman Catholic secular clergy in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In general, the wills provide the following information:

- 1) The amount of the total assets of priests according to dioceses.
- 2) The amount of the total assets of priests according to particular years (for the purposes of this study, decades), and according to status.
- 3) Details of assets, such as property, farms, cash and, sometimes, indications as to how these were acquired.
- 4) Names of legatees and beneficiaries and details of their inheritance, as well as the nature of the relationship with the testator.
- 5) Other miscellaneous information.

As regards 1), total assets are arrived at when executors make an inventory of all property, estate and money and then deduct the total of debts owing. From the 1880's on, the amounts of assets given in the will books are much more precise than

those recorded in the earlier years when amounts are given to the nearest £50 or £100. Also, towards the end of the century, will books give more detailed lists of assets and more precise information about debts owing.

From the lists of assets which are furnished in the wills, it is possible to give an informed estimate of the percentage of priests owning houses and farms. As has been noted elsewhere, this was the prime time for the completion of the church building programme and the purchase and erection of parochial residences. Bishops were anxious that houses and lands remain as church property and the priest's will was clearly a mechanism by which this was accomplished in many cases. The parish priest acquired a house and land in his own name and then, willed them to the bishop or to his successor in the parish. Very often, when this happened, the P.P. put a price on the transaction and the bishop or succeeding P.P. was obliged to pay a sum of money to named persons to compensate for improvements carried out on the property. For those of the clergy who wished to speculate and to acquire houses and farms for their own individual use, it was an ideal opportunity.

As regards the sources of clerical wealth, apart from wealth acquired from farming and the purchase of houses, many of the priests invested their money in stocks and shares. Indeed, often where there are considerable assets, there is evidence of priests who had been trading successfully in the stock market. Andrew Newport, a parish priest in Killaloe diocese, who died in 1879 leaving £3,000, commented: "I made not all of this money from the Church but being prosperous in buying National Bank shares very cheap".¹⁴ Government stocks and securities were popular, as were shares in railway companies, particularly the Midland Great Western Railway Co. and the Great Southern and Western Railway Co. Banks, too, feature prominently, notably the National Bank, the Bank of Ireland and the Hibernian Bank. The published list of shareholders for the Hibernian Bank for the year 1853 shows that 23 priests held shares in the bank. The majority, 13, belonged to Dublin diocese and they included the archbishop Paul Cullen.¹⁵

Sometimes, priests were more adventurous, as in the case of Daniel O'Connell, P.P. of Kilmoe in Cork, who left £3,000 in 1879, and who invested in companies as diverse as the Union Bank of Australia, the London and Westminster Bank, Egyptian bonds and preference shares in the Eastern Telegram Co.¹⁶

¹⁴ Will of Andrew Newport, Limerick DR Will Book, 1876-82, p. 405.

¹⁵ Report of the Directors of the Hibernian Bank to the proprietors, 1853 (Dublin 1854).

¹⁶ Will of Daniel O'Connell, Cork DR Will Book, 1879-81, p. 385.

Occasionally, there was support for projects and businesses which were locally based. William MacMullan of Ardglass, Down and Connor diocese, bought shares in a spinning and mill company.¹⁷ Thomas Treanor, P.P. Tenure, Co. Louth, invested in Drogheda Steam Packets,¹⁸ while the development of Drogheda harbour was supported by John Curry, a parish priest in that town.¹⁹ Thomas Burke of Portumna, Clonfert diocese, had shares in Portumna bridge and Parsonstown railway²⁰ and James Davoren of Oranmore, Galway, supported the Atlantic Royal Mail Company.²¹ Almost all of those who invested seem to have chosen wisely and rare indeed is the priest like Cornelius J. Hogan, a curate in Ossory diocese, who plumped for the New Oriental Bank Corporation Ltd. "now in liquidation...".²² Towards the end of the century, the purchase of shares by parish priests in the *Freeman's Journal* was common, a move encouraged by the hierarchy, following that paper's advocacy of Parnell's cause. Robert O'Shea, P.P. Ballyhale, Kilkenny held papal bonds *Stato Pontifico* and shares in Sweeney and Co., Lower Sackville St., Dublin.²³ A good number of priests held insurance policies, almost always life insurance and generally for sums ranging from £100 to £300.

Priests, too, used the wills to express opinions, which they might not have felt free to express during their lifetime. We have seen how Michael Fitzgerald of Limerick took the opportunity to object to the treatment he had received from his bishop, George Butler, and how a number of Cashel priests had transmitted a message to Patrick Leahy by willing property to Cullen of Dublin. John McGrath, P.P. Portlaw, Waterford, was obviously having difficulties with one of the local teachers. McGrath, the owner of two houses, gave one of them for the use of the school. He also donated £90 a year for the education of the poor Roman Catholic female children of the parish. To all of this, however, was attached the telling clause: "I desire that the provisions of this will shall not extend to the children of the female school until the removal of the present female teacher".²⁴

From a reading of the wills, the impression of a clergy comfortably well off and well insulated against the hardships of that particular era, is reinforced. Indeed, from

¹⁷ Will of William MacMullan, Belfast DR Will Book, 1873-75, p. 246.

¹⁸ Will of Thomas Treanor, T7965, NA.

¹⁹ Will of John Curry, (copy), 30 Dec 1910, NA.

²⁰ Will of Thomas Burke, Tuam DR Will Book, 1877-88, p. 236.

²¹ Will of James Davoren, Tuam DR Will Book, 1858-77, p. 339.

²² Will of Cornelius J. Hogan, Kilkenny DR Will Book, 1895-1901, p.139.

²³ Will of Robert O'Shea, Kilkenny DR Will Book, 1880-84, p. 275.

²⁴ Will of John McGrath, Waterford Will Book, 1879-85, p.504.

some of the wills, the impression that is given is that of priests who were grasping and avaricious and who must have expended a good deal of time and energy in the task of accumulating property and wealth. Among the more spectacular wills, pride of place must go to John Ryan, bishop of Limerick who died in 1864, with his declared assets of £35,000. The source of Ryan's wealth is not evident from his will but he disbursed sums of £4,000, £2,000 and £1,000 to the catholic convents and schools of Limerick. He was generous, too, to his family and his nephews and nieces were in receipt of sums varying from £5,000 to £100.²⁵

One of Ryan's executors was Patrick Hickey, parish priest of Doon, in Cashel diocese, himself no mean financier. The reputation of both men in this regard was well established and Paul Cullen, in a letter to Tobias Kirby in Rome in 1863, comments that Archbishop Leahy was too timid with the Hickeys, one of whom, the P.P. of Doon, "is said to have £13,000 savings in the bank and has got Dr. Ryan to make a will with himself as executor".²⁶ The following month, Cullen wrote again, suggesting once more that Leahy was too partial to the Hickeys "because they are Cashel men". Cullen then added: "Hickey of Doon is said to be almost as rich as Dr. Ryan; he has £15,000 to £20,000. Dr. Ryan in his wills has left £11,000 to relatives and in his last will £5,000 to Hickey, which can hardly stand as there are many proofs that he is not *compos mentis*".²⁷

Patrick Hickey also died in 1864 and his assets are given as under £9,000, the majority of which came from shares in the Great Southern and Western Railway (£6150), the Midland Great Western Railway (£1,000) and the Waterford and Limerick Railway (£750). In addition, he was the owner of some houses and 33 acres of land. He bequeathed portions of the land to the Mercy nuns and the Christian Brothers to establish schools in the parish of Doon.²⁸ According to Archbishop Leahy, Hickey had amassed this large amount of money "chiefly by a judicious management of a little property". Leahy also reported that Hickey had a large number of relatives, all needy but that he had left only £200 each to three nephews and £100 to a niece. The archbishop was sensitive to the disappointment felt by the family and he intended paying them £500, which, he said, was "but conformable to natural justice". He was aware, too, of the possibility of the will being contested. "The family may go to law", he remarked, "in which case the whole £10,000 may be lost when you consider how

²⁵ Will of John Ryan, Limerick DR Will Book, 1858-67, p.518.

²⁶ Paul Cullen to Kirby, 11 April 1863, quoted in Peadar MacSuibhne, **Paul Cullen and his contemporaries**, iv, p.139.

²⁷ Paul Cullen to Kirby, 18 May 1863, quoted in MacSuibhne, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

²⁸ Will of Patrick Hickey, Limerick DR Will Book, 1858-67, p.514.

prejudiced the tribunals are against Catholic charities. If not lost, at any rate more than £500 would be lost in expenses. So, it is best to give away to the relations this sum".²⁹ Leahy was well aware that there was sufficient in reserve for the establishment of the convent and monastery and he obviously felt that £500 spent in buying off the family opposition was money well and wisely spent.

The parish of St. Mary's in Drogheda must have been a most desirable benefice to judge from the wills of two of its parish priests. Thomas Mathews, who died in 1875, had assets amounting to £12,000,³⁰ some of which may have been inherited family wealth. A friend of Daniel O'Connell and Sir John Gray, he came from a well known Drogheda family and his brother, Alderman James Mathews, was, according to the *Freeman's Journal*, the first Catholic magistrate appointed after the passing of the Emancipation Act.³¹ Another P.P. at St. Mary's, Thomas Allen, died in 1890, leaving £4,359, part of which came from investment in an English company. He also possessed houses and property in Trim and the town of Drogheda.³²

Peter Daly, a priest of considerable wealth and influence in Galway city, left £7,000 in 1868³³ and, much to the chagrin of his bishop, John MacEvelly, with whom Daly had conducted a running battle for ten years,³⁴ the money went to Daly's family. Another priest whose lifestyle was the cause of much comment was James Healy of Little Bray in Dublin diocese³⁵ and he died in 1894, leaving £5,039.³⁶ In fact, the clerical wills in the final decade of the century reflect the increased affluence and status of priests generally. Michael Martin, parish priest of Killybegs, Co. Donegal, died in 1896 and left quite a fortune - £11,401.6.7. in all. Again, the money seems to have been generated from his activities on the stock exchange and his family were the principal beneficiaries. One of his sisters, who had spent her life with him, received £2,000, three other sisters and a brother £500 each. Another brother inherited only £1, but his children did receive substantial sums, as did other nieces and nephews. Martin also posted a warning for anyone disputing the will, stipulating that such a person would be deprived of all claim.³⁷

²⁹ Patrick Leahy to Kirby, 15 Nov 1864, quoted in Emmet Larkin, **The Historical Dimensions of Irish Catholicism**, (New York 1976), p.28.

³⁰ Wills and Administrations 1880, p.445.

³¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 29 Dec 1879.

³² Will of Thomas Allen, T14177, NA.

³³ Wills and Administrations 1869, p.120.

³⁴ For details of the dispute, see Bane, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-72.

³⁵ Healy was the subject of a rather flattering biography, **Memories of Fr. Healy of Little Bray**, W.J. Fitzpatrick, (London 1896).

³⁶ Wills and Administrations 1895, p.362.

³⁷ Will of Michael Martin, Londonderry DR Will Book 1895, p.97.

Other late nineteenth century clerical wills worthy of note were those of John A. Barry, P.P. Glounthane, Cork, died 1895, who owned a number of houses in Cork city and who left £8,205,³⁸ James McMahon, P.P. Halston St. Dublin, died 1890, leaving £6,554³⁹ and Daniel J. O'Sullivan, P.P. Dingle, Co. Kerry, died 1898, leaving £6,055.⁴⁰ John W. Evers, P.P. Minard, Co. Longford, died in 1891, leaving estate worth £6,301.⁴¹ Under an agreement with his brother, who predeceased him, Evers inherited over 300 acres of land, which now returned to the Earl of Granard under certain conditions. Evers was also a successful speculator on the stock market and he held government new 3% stock to the value of £4050, from which £2,000 was donated to St. Mel's College, Longford.⁴² And into the next century, financial insecurity was not something that priests had to worry about, as a glance at the wills of 1912 establishes. In that year, Patrick R. Staunton, a parish priest at Tubbercurry in Achonry diocese left the substantial sum of £15, 728. He possessed no less than five houses and a holding of land, but, once again, his fortune was amassed from his dealings in stocks and shares. He invested in firms like Guinness and the Provincial Bank, in newspapers like the *Irish Times* and the *Freeman's Journal* and even in more exotic ventures like Japanese bonds.⁴³

Archbishops and bishops, as we have seen, were generally well off, as apart from their own private income, they were often the recipients of generous bequests. Paul Cullen of Dublin died in 1878 and his assets amounted to £9,000, all of which he bequeathed to diocesan trustees.⁴⁴ Cullen's archrival, John MacHale of Tuam, died in 1881 and left assets worth £5,716.⁴⁵ George Butler of Limerick left £9,053 in 1886⁴⁶ and Michael Comerford of Kildare £5,067 in 1895.⁴⁷

Among the twenty or so priests who left estate in the region of £4,000 approximately were two Maynooth professors, Charles Russell, president of the college,⁴⁸ and Robert Ffrench Whitehead, vice-president. Both men, in fact, came from wealthy backgrounds. Russell's father was a successful Co. Down businessman

³⁸ Will of John A. Barry, Cork DR Will Book 1895-97, p.114.

³⁹ Wills and Administrations 1890, p.536.

⁴⁰ Will of Daniel J. O'Sullivan, Cork DR Will Book 1875-76, p.380.

⁴¹ Wills and Adminstrations 1892, p.259.

⁴² Will of John William Evers, R.C. Dean of Ardagh, ArdDA.

⁴³ Will of Patrick R. Staunton, 13 Mar 1908, NA.

⁴⁴ Will of Paul Cullen, T12618, NA.

⁴⁵ Will of John MacHale, Tuam DR Will Book 1877-88, p.296.

⁴⁶ Wills and Administrations 1886, p.67.

⁴⁷ Wills and Administrations 1895, p.136.

⁴⁸ Wills and Administrations 1880, p.637.

and his mother's family was also very comfortable.⁴⁹ Ffrench Whitehead, who was born in Dublin but was attached to Tuam diocese, was connected to the old aristocratic Galway families of the Blakes and the Ffrenches.⁵⁰ Ffrench Whitehead's money came from investments in stocks,⁵¹ although in the case of Maynooth professors, they could often supplement their income from the revenue generated from the sale of textbooks and commentaries which they produced.

Finally, as regards curates, the amount of their assets is often comparatively insignificant. This is explained by the fact that they had spent so few years in the active ministry before their deaths. Conversely, where there are sizeable assets, it generally means that they were senior curates who had spent a number of years on the mission. And some curates did succeed in amassing significant fortunes. John Thomas Devereux of Wexford, who died in 1889, left assets valued at £4,611.⁵² Nicholas Harpur, also of Wexford, who died in 1880, was worth £3,000⁵³ and Edward G. Quaid of Dublin, who died in 1895, left £2,014.⁵⁴ Thomas Pentony of Armagh diocese, died 1885, had assets amounting to £2,155⁵⁵ and Bernard Farrell, a curate at Monkstown, Co. Dublin, who also died in 1885, left £2,069.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Ambrose Macaulay, **Dr. Russell of Maynooth**, (London 1983), pp.3-6.

⁵⁰ *Freeman's Journal*, 2 Jan 1880.

⁵¹ Will of Robert Ffrench Whitehead, T10,695, NA.

⁵² Wills and Administrations 1890, p.184.

⁵³ Wills and Administrations 1880, p.294.

⁵⁴ Wills and Administrations 1895, p.731.

⁵⁵ Wills and Administrations 1885, p.693.

⁵⁶ Wills and Administrations 1885, p.256.

Conclusions drawn from a study of the wills

Table 7

Priests' wills for individual dioceses 1858-1899

(Sample of 631 wills)

Diocese	P.P.'s	C.C.'s	Total assets	Total assets	Average	Average
			P.P's	C.C's	P.P's	C.C's
Achonry	8	2	£4598	£434	£575	£217
Ardagh	18	7	£27906	£3158	£1550	£451
Armagh	20	6	£14267	£4270	£713	£712
Cashel	22	8	£39000	£4939	£1773	£617
Clogher	10	7	£9454	£7775	£945	£1111
Clonfert	8		£8133		£1017	
Cloyne	18	4	£14520	£1857	£807	£464
Cork/Ross	15	3	£31059	£1329	£2071	£443
Derry	8	2	£8820	£650	£1103	£325
Down and Connor	14	4	£16067	£892	£1148	£223
Dromore	12	2	£6489	£761	£541	£380
Dublin	18	10	£49190	£8296	£2733	£830
Elphin	9	4	£8321	£1732	£925	£433
Ferns	16	11	£7521	£11472	£470	£1043
Galway/ Kilm/Kilf	18	7	£19020	£3519	£1057	£503
Kerry	20	5	£16431	£3311	£822	£662
Kildare	31	5	£51177	£2249	£1651	£450
Killala	11	1	£12437	£100	£1131	£100
Killaloe	25	2	£17453	£1038	£698	£519
Kilmore	20	6	£13368	£2028	£668	£338
Limerick	39	5	£34224	£1310	£878	£262
Meath	44	2	£50517	£1536	£1148	£768
Ossory	33	10	£25721	£3731	£779	£373
Raphoe	8		£45395		£5674	
Tuam	36	3	£27243	£955	£757	£318
Waterford	29	5	£47216	£3745	£1628	£749
Totals	510	121	£605547	£71087		
Average			£1187	£587		

Administrators, that is, priests who had charge of mensal parishes, have been included with parish priests.

Wills for curates in the dioceses of Clonfert and Raphoe have not been located.

The average of £5674 for parish priests in the diocese of Raphoe is surprisingly high. As has already been noted, there were a number of very wealthy priests in this diocese, including John D. McGarvey, P.P. Milford, who left assets worth £24,097.

In some cases, the assets of curates exceed or are on a par with those of parish priests. Clearly, the longer a priest was on the mission, the greater his assets were and since curates could expect to serve for at least twenty years before becoming parish priests, senior curates in wealthy parishes were in a position to accumulate property and money. This almost certainly explains the high average of £1111 for the curates of Clogher diocese. Three of the seven curates were ordained at Maynooth⁵⁷ and of these, two had served as curates for over thirty years and one for over twenty years.

Table 8

Breakdown of priests' wills according to status 1858-1899
(Sample of 661 wills)

Status	Number	Total assets	Average
Bishops	21	£108186	£5152
P.P.'s/Adms.	510	£605547	£1187
C.C.'s	121	£71087	£587
Professors	9	£16304	£1812

It is interesting that the average of bishops' assets is three times higher than that of parish priests, while the average of parish priests' assets is twice that of curates. The prospects for catholic clerics improved with increase in status and the higher up the ecclesiastical ladder a priest progressed, the greater was the likelihood of an increase in his assets.

As has been stated above, the income of professors in seminaries and colleges was often supplemented by the sale of theological and scriptural tracts and commentaries.

⁵⁷ Patrick J. Hamell, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-6.

Table 9

**Breakdown of priests' wills according to decades.
(Sample of 604 wills)**

Decades	No. of		Total no.		Average	
	P.P.'s	C.C.'s	P.P.'s	C.C.'s	P.P.'s	C.C.'s
1860's	98	19	£100754	£9755	£1028	£513
1870's	141	26	£165404	£15064	£1173	£579
1880's	135	34	£178063	£30810	£1319	£906
1890's	112	39	£143637	£14818	£1282	£380

Footnote TABLE 9

Again, administrators are included with parish priests.

The 1850's have not been included, as records commence only in 1858.

From these figures, it would appear that the 1880's was the highpoint of clerical affluence, although why this should be so is difficult to say. In particular, the figure of £906 given as the average for curates seems to suggest that curates in this decade were twice as wealthy as curates in the other decades. However, it is more likely that the figure is inflated by the inclusion of high totals of the assets of individual curates who had accumulated wealth.

The clerical wills of the year 1912 have been taken as a sample to indicate the trend into the twentieth century.

Table 10

**Breakdown of priests' wills for the year 1912
(Sample of 56 wills)**

Status	Number	Total assets	Average
P.P.'s/Adms.	38	£52972	£1394
C.C.'s	18	£9253	£514

From this, it can be seen that there was an improvement in income for parish priests and curates compared with those serving in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Table 11

**Breakdown of the number of priests owning property 1858-1899
(Sample of 467wills).**

	House	Farm	Houses & Farms	Priests with Insurance	Priests with Stocks/Shares
Priests owning one	114 (24%)	119 (25%)			
Priests owning 2 or more	50 (11%)	38 (8%)			
Total	164 (35%)	157 (33%)	112 (24%)	41 (9%)	57 (12%)

Here in some of the wills there is duplication in that some of the priests held farms and insurance policies or owned stocks and shares and also held insurance policies.

In some wills, priests have bequeathed lands to their legatees without any mention of houses. Presumably this has happened in cases where the house in which the priest resided was parochial property.

Table 12

**Breakdown of the beneficiaries of priests' wills 1858-1899
(Sample of 467 wills)**

	Principal	Secondary	Sole Beneficiary
Family	252 (54%)	86 (31%)	120 (69%)
Church	156 (33%)	108 (39%)	41 (23%)
Charity	43 (9%)	64 (24%)	14 (8%)
Housekeeper/ Servant	5 (1%)	14 (5%)	
Others	11 (3%)	3 (1%)	
Total	467	275	175

As regards clerical inheritances, the two main competitors were the priest's family and the church. As can be seen from the table above, the family and the church were the principal legatees in 87% of the wills and the secondary legatees in 70% of

wills. Almost always, where the church was listed as the principal beneficiary, the family was the secondary beneficiary and vice versa. In some cases, the assets were divided between various legatees, as, for instance, a named charity and stipends for masses. The category of sole beneficiary applies to wills where all assets went to one legatee. In the 157 wills where a sole beneficiary is named, the family outnumbered the church by three to one.

By church here is meant bequests of property and money to bishops, successors, convents, priests' benevolent funds; burses for the education of clerical students and towards the building of cathedrals, churches, convents, colleges, altars and chapels; and money for masses, which went directly to the clergy.

Under the heading of charity come bequests to institutions and bequests to the poor as well as bequests included in the general designation "for religious and charitable purposes".

Family, generally, means brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces and, in the case of curates, parents. Certainly, for those with a priest or priests in the family, the rule of celibacy was a bonus and, as can be seen from the figures above, families and relatives fared well and vied with the church as the principal beneficiaries of nineteenth century clerical wills. James O'Connell, P.P. Clerihan in Cashel diocese, left all his property to his brother and the sum of £475 in trust for his brother's children. He then provided the following apologia: "My reason for leaving him all is because he assisted me in making what I have by giving me horses etc. I never got a mission in which I could save any money by the Church, consequently I don't feel bound to leave anything in charity only what I gave from time to time from myself".⁵⁸

Bequests to family sometimes had particular conditions attached. Priests disapproving of their sisters' husbands often made this disapproval clear in their wills. For example, James Magee, P.P. Castlebar, left money to his sister for the education of the children but "independently of her husband"⁵⁹ and Daniel O'Sullivan, a curate in Kenmare, named his sister as the residuary legatee "independent of all control on the part of her husband".⁶⁰ Similarly, Richard Smiddy, P.P. Aghada, Cork, left all his estate to his sister "in her own right and altogether free from the control of her husband".⁶¹ In the case of Timothy Corkery, P.P. Tournafulla, Limerick, it was his

⁵⁸ Will of James O'Connell, Cork DR Will Book, 1889-92, p. 612.

⁵⁹ Will of James Magee, Ballina DR Will Book, 1881-91, p. 278.

⁶⁰ Will of Daniel O'Sullivan, Cork DR Will Book, 1875-76, p. 380.

⁶¹ Will of Richard Smiddy, Cork DR Will Book, 1879-81, p. 354.

brother that earned the disapproval as he willed £100 to his sister-in-law "for her own use, independent of her husband, Michael Corkery".⁶² William Magauran, P.P. Ballygar in Elphin diocese, who died a very wealthy man, provided his widowed sister with a reason not to remarry. He willed her £500 but with the proviso that "she does not get married and if she gets married after the money being paid her I will her son Raphil McLoughlin and his sister power and authority to recover from their mother the said £500".⁶³

Nieces and nephews, in particular, benefitted, as they inherited houses and farms and, also, their education was often provided for under the terms of their uncles' wills. It was very common in the case of nephews who were studying for the priesthood to receive bequests to provide for their education. Again, as with sisters and brothers, bequests to nieces and nephews were sometimes subject to certain conditions being fulfilled. Richard Scott, P.P. St. Mary's, Limerick, willed £200 to his niece on condition that she go out to America to her mother. She was also to get travelling expenses and £20 for an outfit. However, if the niece refused to go, caused trouble or brought legal proceedings, then the bequest was void.⁶⁴ Daniel Corcoran, P.P. Oakfield, Co. Tipperary, who died in 1862 leaving assets worth £4,000, was concerned that his late brother's children should marry suitably. While willing them sums of £200 and £100, he entered this caveat: "If any of my brother Thomas Corcoran's orphans act dishonourably or contract marriages with any persons without the will and permission of my executors, my will and intention is that the offending person so acting will be deprived of all right and claim on any portion of the charitable fund mentioned in this my will and said sum divided among rest of the well conducted orphans of Lower Graigue...".⁶⁵ The two nieces of Thomas Molloy, a curate at Cashel, were each given £200 provided that they did not marry "against the consent of their father".⁶⁶

Priests' housekeepers did not fare nearly as well as family members and probably not as well as people might have thought, given the public perception of their role and influence. Among the more fortunate were the housekeeper of Matthew Fullam, P.P. Milltown, Co. Westmeath, who inherited a house and some land "as her wages partly built the house"⁶⁷ and the housekeeper of Jeremiah O'Connor, P.P.

⁶² Will of Timothy Corkery, T8302, NA.

⁶³ Will of William Magauran, Tuam DR Will Book, 1877-88, p. 331.

⁶⁴ Will of Richard Scott, Limerick DR Will Book, 1867-75, pp. 196-8.

⁶⁵ Will of Daniel Corcoran, Waterford DR Will Book, 1858-63, p. 516.

⁶⁶ Will of Thomas Molloy, Waterford DR Will Book, 1858-63, p. 446.

⁶⁷ Will of Matthew Fullam, Mullingar DR Will Book, 1859-74, p.236.

Ballybunion, who had £400 invested for her.⁶⁸ These were the exceptions as, generally, bequests to housekeepers were in the order of £10 and even £5 or a year's wages. Even then, these bequests were often made subject to the condition of the housekeeper still being in the priest's service at the time of his death.

Of course, in the situation where a member of the priest's family attended to the housekeeping duties, the rewards were much more substantial. It was not uncommon to have a niece or sister or some other relative living and working in the parochial house at this time. For example, Edmund McGuinness, P.P. Tullyish, Dromore diocese, left his house and farm to a niece "who has lived with me and taken care of me for many years".⁶⁹ The nephew of James McAleenan, a parish priest in Down and Connor diocese, who lived with his uncle, inherited all houses and lands.⁷⁰ Archbishop John MacHale's sister, Barbara, kept house for him at Tuam and was rewarded with a grant of £500 in his will.⁷¹ Patrick Kelly, P.P. Shanclough in Killala diocese, left a house and land to his brother "now living with me"⁷² as did James O'Rorke of Kilmaine in Tuam diocese who was careful to add that he had obtained the property in an individual capacity and "cumbered with no ecclesiastical trusts".⁷³ John Doyle, P.P. Maryborough, Kildare diocese, left a house and farm to his nephew who resided with him and £200 to a nephew, who was a student at Clonliffe College.⁷⁴ It must also be borne in mind that families benefitted from the situation where a priest died intestate, as the estate became the inheritance of the next of kin and this, of course, was another reason why bishops were so anxious to ensure that wills were made. While family and friends benefitted from the rule of celibacy, it should be pointed out that, if there were no such rule, Catholic priests would have had the opportunity of marrying into wealthy families, thereby increasing their assets.

⁶⁸ Will of Jeremiah O'Connor, Limerick DR Will Book, 1858-67, p.546.

⁶⁹ Will of Edmund McGuinness, Belfast DR Will Book, 1864-67, p.601.

⁷⁰ Will of James McAleenan, Belfast DR Will Book, 1875-77, p.612.

⁷¹ Will of John MacHale, Tuam DR Will Book, 1877-88, p.296.

⁷² Will of Patrick Kelly, Ballina DR Will Book, 1865-81, p.57.

⁷³ Will of James O'Rorke, Ballina DR Will Book, 1865-81, p.395.

⁷⁴ Will of John Doyle, Kilkenny DR Will Book, 1895-1901, p.260.

Table 13**Comparative table of wills of clergymen of other denominations and R.C. priests for the years 1860 and 1890.****(Sample of 104 wills of clergymen)**

Denomination	Year	Number	Total Assets	Average
Church of Ireland	1860	33	£193450	£5862
Church of Ireland	1890	49	£213631	£4360
Presbyterian	1860	5	£7200	£1440
Presbyterian	1890	17	£31350	£1844
Roman Catholic	1860	20	£17702	£885
Roman Catholic	1890	43	£45364	£1055

Two years, 1860 and 1890, have been chosen at random in order to compare the wills of Protestant clergymen with those of their Catholic counterparts. In 1860, the total number of wills of Church of Ireland clergymen registered was 33 and their assets totalled £193,450. The two clergymen with the greatest assets were Thomas Lindesay of Derry at £35,000 and Thomas Gough Bunbury, also of Derry, with £30,000 while the lowest was Nicholas Baker of Clogher at £50. This gives an average of £5862. The average of the 5 wills of the 5 Presbyterian clergymen was £1440. In that same year, there were 20 wills registered for Catholic clerics. Their total assets amounted to £17,702, with the highest being Michael Clarke of Clonfert at £4000 and the lowest three priests at £200. This gives an average of £885.

In 1890, there were 49 Church of Ireland wills, 17 Presbyterian wills and 2 Methodist wills. The total assets of the Church of Ireland wills amounted to £213,631, the highest being John West of Dublin at £37,078 and the lowest Charles Wroth of Tuam at £80. This gives an average of £4360. The total assets of Presbyterian wills comes to £24,150, giving an average of £1420, while the average of the two Methodist wills is £1120. The number of wills of Catholic clergymen for 1890 is 43. The assets totalled £45364, with the highest being James McMahon of Dublin at £6554 and the lowest John Ward of Clogher at £57. This gives an average of £1055.

From these figures we can see that Catholic priests had considerably less wealth at their disposal than had their counterparts, particularly in the Church of Ireland. The comparative averages for 1860 were £5862 for the clerics of the Church of Ireland and

£885 for Catholic priests. For 1890, the average for Church of Ireland clerics was £4360 compared with an average of £1055 for Catholic priests. Church of Ireland clergymen owned considerably more property than did Catholic priests and some of their ministers could compare favourably with the wealthiest people in the country. Another factor here to be considered is the effects of the rule of celibacy, since Church of Ireland and clergymen of other denominations could improve their situation by marrying into a wealthy family.

Disputed Wills

As regards the property and estate held by priests, the distinction between what was ecclesiastical and what was personal was sometimes blurred. With both sides pressing their claims, it was inevitable that clashes should occur from time to time, particularly where priests died intestate or where clerical wills were obscure and lacking in clarity in their provisions.

Where disputes did arise, it was sometimes difficult for the church authorities to decide as to the line of action to be pursued. There was no doubt in episcopal minds but that the church had claims on all property but, at the same time, caution had to be exercised in pursuance of claims to avoid accusations of avarice or, that great nineteenth century deterrent, lest scandal be given. Often, however, families persisted in their claims and, despite episcopal reluctance, there was recourse to the law and matters were finally resolved following judicial arbitration. What bishops particularly wished to avoid was the situation where the family felt so aggrieved that they adopted a stronger line, such as refusing to surrender possession or occupying houses.

There was an example of the latter in 1867 in Dublin diocese, following the death of the parish priest of Rush, William J. Mulhall. A neighbouring parish priest, M. B. Kelly of The Naul, reported that a brother of the late parish priest's, John B. Mulhall, an attorney living in Carlow, was determined to keep possession of the parochial house until such time as he was paid the sum of £160, which he claimed had been expended by his brother on repairing the house. Kelly feared that, should John Mulhall carry out his threat, the landlord would give notice to all parties to quit the house and grounds, as there was no lease on the place. Kelly also alleged that John Mulhall had influenced his brother in changing his will and making one more favourable to himself.⁷⁵

⁷⁵M.B. Kelly to Cullen, The Naul, 17 Aug 1867, DDA.

Two days later, Paul Cullen had a letter from Patrick J. Duffe, a curate at Lusk, who stated that he was no longer an executor to Mulhall's will. According to Duffe, the priest had had a visit from his brother, the attorney, two weeks before his death and that a new will had been drawn up or the old will altered. At that stage, Duffe alleged, his own name had been replaced as executor by that of John Mulhall. Duffe said that Mulhall had remained in the parochial house for some days after his brother's funeral and that he had stated his intention of staying there until the effects had been auctioned. However, he and his family had since departed, leaving the curate, John Gormley, in charge of the house. Duffe was certain that John Mulhall would seek compensation for his brother's outlay on the house and consequently, he was advising Cullen to take possession of the house immediately, "thus preventing any scandal or litigation that may probably arise". He feared, too, that the £200 which Fr. Mulhall had left for masses would be appropriated by his brother for his own use as, said Duffe, "he is a poor man and has, I understand, a large family of thirteen children".⁷⁶

The curate at Rush, John Gormley, took a much more conciliatory line, stating that John Mulhall had never thought of taking possession of the parochial house. Gormley himself had taken possession of all sacred vessels, vestments and parochial books. Having talked with John Mulhall, it was Gormley's impression that he would allow matters to rest so until a successor was appointed. He felt that Mulhall would hold an auction on the day of the month's mind but, when all effects had been sold, Gormley firmly believed that Mulhall would have no further interest.⁷⁷

Gormley's optimism was not justified and he wrote some days later to say that he had heard that John Mulhall had indeed taken possession of the parochial house. He found this hard to believe, as he reported having a conversation with Mulhall and having offered him a room in the house, which Mulhall had refused. "If your Eminence require me to put the question directly to him I shall do so", Gormley suggested.⁷⁸ Three days later, Duffe wrote again to say that Gormley would, during Mulhall's absence from the place, take possession of the house that day.⁷⁹

The next correspondence on the matter came from Richard Mangan, who had been named by the priest as an executor. Mangan stated that Rev. William Mulhall had made a will some time ago but that he had forgotten to sign it. A new one was drawn up by his brother in which the brother, John Mulhall, and Richard Mangan were named

⁷⁶ Patrick J. Duffe to Cullen, Lusk, 19 Aug 1867 DDA.

⁷⁷ J. Gormley to Cullen, Rush, 21 Aug 1867, DDA.

⁷⁸ J. Gormley to Cullen, Rush, 25 Aug 1867, DDA.

⁷⁹ Patrick J. Duffe to Cullen, Lusk, 28 Aug 1867, DDA.

as executors. Mangan declared that he had no further interest in the matter and that he was leaving it to John Mulhall, the legatee, to take out probate. Anyway, Mangan felt, the assets would amount to very little unless some of the large sum expended by William Mulhall on the chapel and chapel house was repaid.⁸⁰ In fact, William Mulhall's assets amounted to £600, quite a substantial sum for a poor man and the will was proved at the Principal Registry in October 1867 by John B. Mulhall.⁸¹

We do not know how the Mulhall case ended but it is possible that once the curate had taken possession of the parochial house, John Mulhall, himself a solicitor, would have been aware that he had no option but to accept the situation. It is possible, too, that John Mulhall may have been offered a sum of money in settlement, as was done in other similar disputes. This was the course adopted in the case of the disputed will of Fr. Barry of Saggart in Dublin diocese in 1884. J. J. Keon, one of the curates, wrote to Cardinal McCabe to say that the assets should amount to about £700 and that a draft of the present will had been found in which a nephew had been left £100. Keon had given this draft to the nephew, "knowing perfectly well its legal worthlessness", as the nephew was with the priests when it had been found. The nephew and his elder brothers seemed to threaten opposition but, Keon reported, "Fr. Scally and I won them over". Keon thought that, in the case of the nephew, it was "a little bit hard", as he had been adopted and educated by Fr. Barry and he had presumed that Fr. Barry had provided for him in the will. Keon's suggestion was that, presuming that no opposition was offered to the will, Fr. Scally and himself be allowed "to lay a proposal of a present of some value to the nephew".⁸²

We have seen how, in Cashel diocese, Archbishop Leahy considered it worth his while to offer a settlement of £500 to the relatives of Patrick Hickey of Doon. In the same diocese, a legal settlement was reached in the dispute about the will of Dr. Philip Fitzgerald, parish priest of Ballingarry, who died in April 1868, leaving assets amounting to almost £3,000.⁸³ The dispute centred around a house in Glenview in which the late P.P. resided and a farm of 22 acres. According to the will, the house and farm were to be sold to the highest bidder but preference was to be given to Fitzgerald's successor if he were prepared to pay as much as any other. There was, then, the contentious clause which stated that should Dr. Leahy, the archbishop, consider it suitable for a convent or a Christian Brothers' school, it would be given

⁸⁰Richard Mangan to Cullen, Jamestown, Finglas, 31 Aug 1867, DDA.

⁸¹ Wills and Administrations 1867, p. 257, NA.

⁸² J.J. Keon to McCabe, Kilmacud, Stillorgan, 29 Sept 1884, DDA.

⁸³ Wills and Administrations 1868, p. 162, DDA.

"*gratis* for that purpose".⁸⁴ This was an offer which any bishop would find difficult to refuse and two of Fitzgerald's nephews, Thomas and Philip, objected. One of them went so far as to take forcible possession and Leahy was obliged to resort to the threat of legal action to have the nephew removed. Before the matter could come to court, however, a compromise was effected. The Fitzgeralds were first offered £25 or £30 to surrender possession but they refused and demanded £50. Finally, a sum of £41 was agreed, the Fitzgeralds capitulated and the property was released to Leahy.⁸⁵

Sometimes, priests who were ill were placed in an invidious situation when it came to making a will. They were often dependent for their maintenance on a member or members of their families, who would certainly have expected to be adequately rewarded in the priest's will. This is borne out in the case of Samuel Parks, a priest of Elphin diocese, who was living with relatives. In May 1887, Patrick Hanly, a priest in Castlerea, informed Bishop Gillooly that he had visited Parks, who told him that his brother and sister had presented him with a will for his signature about a month previously. They threatened the ailing priest that, if he did not make a distribution of his money in their favour, they would "throw him out". The priest signed but he was unhappy and wished to alter the will. The writer contacted a solicitor, a Mr. Scroupe, who was reluctant to visit the priest, as he felt that litigation would inevitably ensue and he did not wish to become involved. Also, Hanly observed, the moment the solicitor made an appearance, the friends would know the object of his visit and Parks would be asked to leave. Hanly was aware, too, that if he and Scroupe went to the house, suspicion of having influenced the sick priest's will would be inevitable in any subsequent investigation.⁸⁶

The solicitor clearly changed his mind as he accompanied a Fr. Foley on a visit to the Parks' residence. They were not allowed to see the priest and Hanly reported that "his brother forbade any access to his room", standing at the door and assuming a threatening attitude so that "nothing but physical force could dislodge him". The visitors stated that they were calling at the invitation of Fr. Parks but this only had the effect of "provoking stern opposition and a marked show of bad temper on the part of the relatives". The solicitor had made a careful note of all that had occurred and he would contact the bishop later. He also repeated that, unless Fr. Parks could be brought to town, he could not promise to assist at the making of another will due to the certainty of litigation. Hanly then added that the people of the town were reluctant to

⁸⁴ Copy of the will of Philip Fitzgerald, 29 July 1866, CDA.

⁸⁵ Michael Joseph Laffan, solicitor, to Leahy and other papers, 1868, CDA.

⁸⁶ Patrick Hanly to Gillooly, The Presbytery, Castlerea, 20 May 1887, EDA.

admit the priest to their houses as "it appears he was always troublesome and not cleanly in his habits". The services now required to attend to him were "constant and disagreeable" and he had to be helped "in every movement". The solicitor was of the opinion that it was better to leave matters as they were and to contest the will on the death of the priest. "Any advantage that can be taken of our visits to him during his illness will be availed of but presently the Parks party are masters of the situation", Hanly concluded.⁸⁷

As a note in Gillooly's hand in the diocesan archives shows, agreement was eventually reached with a sister of the priest's, Jane Parks. As Scroupe had predicted, an objection had been lodged in court against the will but Jane Parks agreed to withdraw the objection on condition that the bishop would exclude from Fr. Parks' assets the sum of money lodged in the National Bank collected for the benefit of the new Convent of Mercy, Castlerea and would reclaim under the will only the balance of £70 or so remaining in the National Bank.⁸⁸ The assets did not, in fact, amount to very much and no doubt did not merit the trouble and expense of engaging in a legal dispute.

In his book, **Ireland under Coercion**, Hurlbert refers to a case in 1887, in which the will of Fr. McGarvey of Milford in Raphoe diocese was contested in a Dublin court. According to Hurlbert, McGarvey had left all of his estate for religious and charitable purposes, except £800 which he had bequeathed to his niece, Mrs. O'Connor. The priest died in possession of a farm at Ardara and cash to the amount of £23,711. His total assets are listed as £24,097. 12s.⁸⁹ Mrs. O'Connor contested the will and an action against her to establish the will was taken by a curate at Letterkenny and the archbishop of Armagh, Dr. McGettigan, who had been bishop of Raphoe at the time the will was made. It was found that there was no evidence to sustain the plea of the niece that "undue influence" had been exerted upon her uncle by the bishop or by anyone else. The judge declared the conduct of the plaintiff in advancing a charge of "undue influence" in such circumstances against ecclesiastics to be most reprehensible. The archbishop intimated through his lawyers that he would pay the costs as Mrs. O'Connor was a poor woman who had taken the action as a result of her disappointment at receiving so small a part of so large an inheritance. The archbishop's lawyer, Mr. McDermott Q.C., was at pains to explain that his client, who had nothing to do with the making of the will was bound to defend it "as proper and in accordance with the fitness of things that what had been received from the poor should be given

⁸⁷ Patrick Hanly to Gillooly, The Presbytery, Castlerea, 29 May 1887, EDA.

⁸⁸ Note in Gillooly's hand, EDA.

⁸⁹ Wills and Administrations 1888, p. 472, NA.

back to the poor".⁹⁰ Despite these admirable sentiments, it is unlikely that the farm was returned to the family or shared out among the parishioners.

The bad feeling and the antipathy that resulted from the conflicting claims of family and church meant that battle was sometimes joined before the death of the particular priest. Both parties were anxious to protect what they saw as their rightful inheritance and were deeply suspicious of their rivals' intentions. Michael Kelly, a curate at Ballinahown in Ardagh diocese, wrote to his bishop, Bartholomew Woodlock, to inform him of the impending death of the parish priest, Canon Lee. Kelly complained of being treated "with scant respect" by Canon Lee's brother. He had taken charge of the Canon's keys but he was challenged by the brother, Luke Lee, who wished to know by what authority he had taken the keys. Kelly replied the bishop's, as there might be papers in the Canon's cabinet that concerned other persons. Lee then accused the curate of interfering in matters that did not concern him. Kelly reported that he had found £140 in the Canon's cash box and he intended lodging the money in the bishop's and his own name. Lee would not hear of it and would only agree to its being lodged in his own name and that of the other curate, Peter Redehan. Kelly was sure that the Canon had intended this money to be used for religious purposes.⁹¹

Later, Kelly told Woodlock that Peter Redehan had seen Luke Lee counting a bundle of notes and he asked him how much there was. Lee replied £35. Some money was now missing and Kelly stated, rather disingenuously, that "the money must have been taken by someone and I do not know by whom". He surely had his suspicions, as he related how he had the key of the locked press but that the key of the cash box was in Lee's possession.⁹²

Woodlock was not too pleased with the curate's performance and one week later, Kelly was writing again, attempting to explain the disappearance of the £35. "The whole matter", the curate pleaded, "is giving me a great deal of annoyance. I look on it as a charge against my honesty". Lee had threatened that he would bring a charge against Kelly, although he did not specify the nature of the charge and he was most indignant when Kelly had told him that the money was for charitable purposes.⁹³

⁹⁰ Hurlbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 305-307.

⁹¹ M. Kelly to Woodlock, Ballinahown, 30 June [no year], ArdDA.

⁹² M. Kelly to Woodlock, Ballinahown, 30 Oct [no year], ArdDA.

⁹³ M. Kelly to Woodlock, Ballinahown, 3 Nov [no year], ArdDA.

The Canon recovered temporarily, putting an end to the squabbling, but the curate, Kelly, was still unable to explain the mystery of the missing money. Canon Lee died on 26 August 1889, leaving assets of £592.10s.⁹⁴ In the end, he may have satisfied all parties, as both church and family benefitted from his will, while the residue went to the poor of the parish.⁹⁵

Not all disputes were attended with such bitterness and matters were sometimes arranged more amicably, especially when the family was well disposed towards the church and not so much in need of the inheritance. This can be seen in the case of the will of Dr. Neil O'Flanagan, parish priest of Granard, and, while living, a friend and adviser to the bishop, Bartholomew Woodlock. O'Flanagan willed some land to his nephew but what is more interesting here is the manner in which O'Flanagan acquired the land. It had formerly been the property of a Fr. Edward McGann, and he had acquired it from a man in the town called Beatty, who, unable to pay his rent, had given the land to McGann until he would be in a position to redeem it. McGann held on to the land without offering Beatty any compensation. It was said that Dr. O'Flanagan had then taken the land from McGann, again without payment, although the O'Flanagan family claimed to have a receipt for money paid for this land. The original tenant, Beatty, attempted to take possession of it and the case was to come before the county court. Bishop Woodlock was advised to stay his hand and not become involved with the litigants until the case was heard. The bishop's informant commented: "I would not wish to be wrong with these people. They cannot be blamed so much for keeping what they get from men who ought to know better".⁹⁶

The bishop's particular concern was to ensure possession of the parochial house and lands and one of the curates assured him that the O'Flanagan family was anxious to settle matters. They had given the nephew, Dr. Kenny, £50 for the land and the curate was of the opinion that, on the payment of this sum, the property would pass to the church authorities.⁹⁷ Later, from a letter written in connection with an application to the Board of Works for a glebe loan, it is evident that this transaction was completed. There was an ironic twist in that the bishop had valued the land at £90 for the purposes of the loan but he was reminded by a Board official that it had been purchased for £50.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Wills and Administrations 1889, p.393, NA.

⁹⁵ Copy of the will of Peter Canon Lee, 2 April 1884, ArdDA.

⁹⁶ J. Smyth to Woodlock, Granard, 6 April 1893, ArdDA.

⁹⁷ E. O'Reilly to Woodlock, Granard, 24 June 1893, ArdDA.

⁹⁸ Willie O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Toreen Lodge, Granard, 1 March 1894; J. Tuohy, secretary, to Woodlock, Granard, 1 May 1894, ArdDA.

Priests and Lay Wills

During the nineteenth century, the Catholic church benefitted considerably from lay wills. There were bequests of property and of money to ecclesiastical institutions and individuals and very frequently, there were bequests of money for masses. Occasionally, charges were brought of unnecessary interference by priests in the making of wills and of exerting undue influence on the testators. Typical of this kind of charge was that made by a Mr. H. Lambert to Dublin against a Fr. Lambert, who was not related to the family. According to the writer, the priest came to administer the last rites to a seventy year old woman. Then, the writer went on, the priest sat down and wrote a will for her, bequeathing the entire estate to himself. The only witnesses were two old women who could neither read nor write. The writer had taken the priest to task but he said that the reverend gentleman was "quite insensible" and had taken possession. "The perpetrator is a reckless man", the writer commented, "who defies control and like some others of the Maynooth school, conceives himself authorized to trample on all laws divine and human". According to the writer, the priest had said that he was authorised to refuse the last rites to any person who refused to make a will when required by him to do so. The writer claimed that the priest had offered to surrender possession if he were paid £150. The bishop and the parish priest had refused to take any action and that was why the case was now being referred to Dublin.⁹⁹

That the Catholic church benefitted to a significant extent from lay wills is beyond doubt. There is not, however, any great body of evidence to sustain the argument that this was accomplished by undue influence on the part of the clergy. Apart from anything else, the exercise of such clerical influence is extremely difficult to prove. Allegations were made in a couple of cases in Ardagh. One concerned a Patrick Conroy, who lived in Longford and who, in his will of 1868, bequeathed a number of houses and tenements called Conroy's Court to Rev. Neil McCabe, bishop of Ardagh. According to Conroy's nephew, in a letter to McCabe's successor, Woodlock, in 1880, Patrick Conroy had changed his mind two weeks after making the will and had sent for Fr. Reynolds of St. Mel's College to call on him so that he could make a new will. Reynolds promised to call but did not do so. The nephew, the only relative on the male side, was now writing to Woodlock, asking him to cancel the will in favour of Mary Conroy, Patrick's widow, who was aged eighty and very delicate.¹⁰⁰ The charge here

⁹⁹ H. Lambert to Dean, Carnagh, 30 March 1854, DDA.

¹⁰⁰ James Conroy to Woodlock, Dublin St. Longford, 21 Feb 1880, ArdDA.

seems to be one of neglect rather than of influence and the nephew is really appealing to Woodlock to make some provision for the widow.

John Smyth of Bornacolla wrote to Woodlock in 1888 to give him the good news concerning the will of John Farrell. Having made some provision for his relatives, Farrell nominated Woodlock as the residuary legatee with the sum of £500 of unaccounted stock at his disposal. He had also made "a very liberal provision for masses". Smyth thought that the bishop's charities would benefit to the amount of £1,000. Smyth was delighted but declared that the wife was "mad". Understandably, Smyth's verdict on John Farrell was that he had always been "a practical intelligent Christian man".¹⁰¹

In his book, **Priests and People in Ireland**, published in 1902, Michael J. McCarthy was attempting to demonstrate the domination of the Irish people by the Catholic clergy. To support his thesis, McCarthy made reference to what he called "the vast amounts" handed over to the priests for masses and he cited the cases of Miss B. O'Grady of Pembroke Road, Dublin, who left £1660 to Bishop O'Dwyer of Limerick and Mary Hamilton of Tarbert who had left £2,900 for church purposes and for masses.¹⁰²

McCarthy makes much, perhaps too much, of a court case which was reported in June 1902, in which a Fr. Barrett of Cork sought to establish the will of Miss Margaret Coleman. Barrett, although not a relative, was the sole beneficiary of Coleman's will worth about £20,000. Barrett, who lived in one of her houses, attended the dying woman when the will was made. The will was contested by the woman's relatives but the jury found for the plaintiff and a decree of probate was granted. Again, one has to say that much more is implied than is actually proved and it demonstrates once more the difficulty in attempting to prove conclusively the exercise of undue influence.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹John Smyth to Woodlock, Bornacoola, 7 Feb 1888, ArdDA.

¹⁰² Michael J. McCarthy, **Priests and People in Ireland**, (London 1902), pp. 111, 119.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 329.

Chapter Five

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

By mid century the church building programme was well under way and attention was now being focussed on the need to provide proper accommodation for parochial clergy. In accordance with the statutes of Thurles, parish priests were obliged to fill in a document known as form of schedule, which was sent to parish priests and priests in charge by the bishop and returned to him some days prior to his visit to the parish for the administration of the sacrament of confirmation. This form attempted to establish, firstly, the amount of property in clerical hands and, secondly, the situation with regard to title or lease. Thus, parish priests were obliged to list the chapels, the titles by which they were held or the details of lease, and particulars regarding parochial houses and glebes (lands attached to a parish church). There was a section requiring them to list numbers of church vessels and vestments, a section dealing with the schools of the parish and a section seeking information about masses and the administration of the sacraments.

The form of schedule could be used to elicit other information and Bishop Gillooly of Elphin diocese, for instance, had two sections added. One of these additional sections required the priest to list names of gentry owning land or residing in the parish, names of gentlemen or farmers who had children at boarding schools "or could afford to send them to such schools" and the "names and characters of young men aspiring to the Priesthood". The second additional section invited observations on subjects connected with religion "on which the clergy may deem it useful to give information to the Bishop, more especially public scandals and abuses". Finally, the priest was asked to provide the names of "public sinners".¹

By means of the form of schedule, then, the bishop could obtain a very useful overview of the situation in his diocese with regard to property and church administration. It must be said, too, that, as the nineteenth century progressed and as more and more property came into the hands of individual priests, church authorities were anxious that this property should be properly vested in church trustees. There was the added anxiety that such property could pass to the priest's relatives and so, a good deal of episcopal energy was expended on ensuring that such an undesirable situation should be averted.

¹ Form of schedule, Gillooly papers, EDA.

Dr. Slattery of Cashel was a bishop who took a particular interest in raising the standard of living among the clergy as well as regularising the situation with regard to church property.² The responses to the form of schedule from 44 parishes over the years 1851- 55 available in the Cashel archives are interesting and provide a useful guide to the situation at that time. Of these 44, it would appear that only 12 pastors had some form of lease on their chapels, and where these leases did exist, they were in the form of local arrangements.³ For instance, the chapel in Golden was leased from a local landowner, Vincent Scully, for 50 years at two shillings a year and the chapel at Fethard was leased from William Barton at the yearly rent of one shilling.⁴ Of the 28 parishes that responded to the question about the parochial house, only two, Kilcummin and Hospital, had the use of premises which could be designated parochial. In Kilcummin, the parochial house and one acre of land was held free of rent under prescription⁵ and in Hospital, in 1852, there was a parochial house and a glebe of ten acres given by the Kirwan family.⁶ By 1855, the situation in Hospital had improved considerably and there was now a parochial house, the gift of Lord Kenmare.⁷ In Kerry diocese in 1856, of ten parishes mentioned in Bishop Moriarty's diary, nine had no parochial house.⁸

The establishment of a parochial residence became a priority and a standard task for many parish priests and some curates. For some clerics, the building of the parochial house or houses was a major project, which involved a good deal of time and effort, as they immersed themselves in all the details of the operation from acquiring suitable sites to raising the necessary funds. Those entrusted with the task were expected to keep a vigilant eye on possible sites becoming available in their parishes and, where such sites did become available, priests were quick to encourage their bishops to acquire the property. Fairly typical is the advice offered by Thomas Heffernan of Valleymount, Blessington, in Dublin diocese, who informed his archbishop that he knew of a farm of 40 acres which was available at the rent of £14 per annum. The owner required an answer within the week and Heffernan pointed out that the farm could be set for the eleven months at £40 or £50, which, he said, would considerably assist the support of a second curate.⁹ By way of encouragement to the archbishop, Heffernan added that he would apply at once for an additional curate "had I

² Introduction to Slattery papers, Mark Tierney, CDA.

³ Forms of schedule 1851 - 55, Slattery papers, CDA.

⁴ *Ibid* 1852.

⁵ *Ibid* 1853.

⁶ *Ibid* 1852.

⁷ Lord Kenmare to Croke, Killarney, 16 Dec 1899, CDA.

⁸ Kieran O'Shea, *An Extract from Bishop Moriarty's Diary 1856*, *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society* 1984, pp. 113-25.

⁹ Thomas Heffernan to Walsh, Valleymount, Blessington, 16 Nov 1899, DDA.

a suitable place but there is none".¹⁰ Thomas Heffernan, then, was recommending the acquisition of the property for two reasons - as a suitable site for the building of a parochial residence and as a means of obtaining revenue for the support of a second curate.

Another cleric with an eye to the property market, Patrick O'Reilly of Fenagh in Ardagh diocese, informed his bishop of a farm of 26.5 acres near the parochial residence, stating that it was the most convenient that might be procured for some time. He pointed out that, although the size of the holding was larger than that permitted by diocesan statutes, he thought that the owner might be persuaded to reduce the number of acres if O'Reilly "showed any inclination to accept it".¹¹ Similarly, Patrick Daly of Carrigart in Raphoe diocese told his bishop, James McDevitt, of the farm which he had acquired for the sum of £117. Daly was proud of his acquisition - "The same farm cost the seller £130 a year ago", Daly boasted, "There are those who say 'tis dear at what I gave for it but I met one or two farmers the day of the sale in a different quarter of the parish where I had a sick call without knowing it was sold said had they the money they would give £150 for it". He pointed out that there was at least £20 worth of turf on the farm, three acres of good clay and three or four more of clay and moss. In addition, there was enough grass and hay for a horse and a cow or two. The total extent of the farm was 11 Irish acres. The rent, £5 per annum, Daly described as "exceedingly low", the Poor Law valuation being £4.15s.¹²

In Cashel diocese, Archbishop Croke took a strong line by insisting that arrangements be made to provide proper accommodation and he enforced this by demanding that parish priests build parochial houses before being fully inducted into their parishes.¹³ One can see the effect of this from the biographical notes available on Cashel clergy in the latter part of the nineteenth century, as many of them refer to priests as having built parochial houses. Indeed, for many clergymen the building of a parochial house or church gave them a palpable sense of achievement and provided them with a lasting monument, something that is evident from obituary notices, where building feats are sometimes listed as their greatest accomplishment.¹⁴

¹⁰ Thomas Heffernan to Walsh, Valleymount, Blessington, 20 Nov 1899, DDA.

¹¹ P. O'Reilly to Woodlock, Foxfield, Fenagh, 16 June 1883, Ard DA.

¹² Patrick Daly to McDevitt, Carrigart, 11 Feb 1875, RDA.

¹³ Index of Cashel clergy, Walter Skehan, CDA.

¹⁴ A typical example is the obituary notice of Patrick Hoyne, C.C. Aghavillan in Ossory diocese, which appeared in the *Kilkenny Journal* 15 March 1890. Hoyne is credited with the "erection of a suitable parochial dwelling, one of the best in the diocese".

Selecting the site was the easy part of the business. Financing the operation was altogether more complex and demanded greater knowledge of financial matters and management skills, depending on the resources of the parish and the intended scale of the building project. Reflecting on the skills required for the planning and particularly for the financing of these projects, it is surprising that seminaries did not include in their curricula even a basic training programme in financial management. Their failure to do so was perhaps just another example of the gulf that existed between the textbook education on offer in the seminaries and the reality of the mundane, yet specialised, tasks which priests were expected to undertake as an integral part of their parish duties.

Obviously the poorer the parish, the greater the challenge faced by the priest. Denis Grey, writing from Edgeworthstown in Ardagh, stated that the presbytery at Drumshambo cost about £500. The receipts of this parish were very small, scarcely enough for two priests and consequently, there was little inducement to build, as the P.P. would have to bear a heavy rent.¹⁵ Henry Brennan of Kenagh, in the same diocese, appeared at first to take the democratic approach. He put the matter before the people, stressing the necessity for a parochial house. He informed them of the opportunity, "which might not continue long", of borrowing two thirds of the money. He said that he would like their subscriptions to be entirely voluntary and that by their subscriptions they would prove their desire to have a decent dwelling "for the priest who lived amongst them". Then, in less democratic manner, he called the names and each one had to pledge an amount of money. The result was that he received pledges for about £180, "which was certainly very generous considering the times and the few families in the parish". He informed the bishop that he expected the money would be paid before Christmas and that he had already spoken to the architect - obviously having anticipated the people's response.¹⁶

One of the principal difficulties facing the building priests was that of having to undertake hefty financial commitments. Here again, much depended on the knowledge and management skills of individual clerics. Most of the priests erred on the side of caution, proving themselves well versed in management of monies and particularly, in capitalising on whatever grants and loans were available to them. They were quick to apply to the Office of Public Works for government loans, such as those which became available to them under The Glebe Loans (Ireland) Act of 1870. Under the terms of this Act, government loans were provided for the erection of glebe-houses to 'ministers

¹⁵ D. Grey to Woodlock, Edgeworthstown, 4 Jan [1890], Ard DA.

¹⁶ Henry Brennan to Woodlock, Kenagh, Longford, 16 Aug 1879, Ard DA.

of any religious denomination whatsoever'.¹⁷ Despite criticism, it was welcomed by many priests and so, for instance, Matthew Cullen of Avoca in the diocese of Dublin declared his intention of applying for "at least £700" to build additions to his present residence and to provide accommodation for the curates.¹⁸

In a diocese like Ardagh, where the building of a parochial house would have imposed a considerable financial burden on the poor parishioners of many parishes, it was essential that P.P's be familiar with the grants available from the state. In October, 1879, John Briody of Fenagh parish, Carrick-on-Shannon, wrote to Woodlock reminding him that the deadline for applying for loans from the Board of Works was the following August and he stated his intention of borrowing £200. Major O'Beirne, a land owner from Jamestown, had promised £100 and Briody would try to collect another £50. He was opposed to offering "those enormous sums" paid for pieces of land which were put on the market by bankrupt tenants. He was of the opinion that a priest with a house on the chapel plot would be a misery "without some little convenience of land" but he thought it better to avail of the loan before it expired. He added that the parish was already in debt as a result of having built a large schoolhouse.¹⁹

By February 1880, Briody had purchased a site at £16 with a lease for 999 years at £2 per annum. He had prepared plans and the other necessary documents for the Board of Works. He himself would be named contractor "in order to save on the business" and all he required from the bishop was that he indemnify Briody himself and his successors. "I am at expense already", he concluded, "and will be at very considerable expense independent of [the] loan which in such a poor place as this is much to me".²⁰

Two weeks later, however, Briody was writing again to express his displeasure at the lease of the plot being offered by Major O'Beirne. He complained that the burden of the taxes would fall on the tenants, which, with the interest of the money to be spent on the house, would make Fenagh "a very Siberia for any P.P.". "There is no profit in this plot", he continued, "I will have to pay for grass for a cow, hay for a horse, for turbary, nothing but misery". He was now considering a return to his original plan of building on the chapel plot as, with the conditions of this lease, he felt that he would be saddling himself with "a galling load" and that his memory would be held "as that of a

¹⁷ cf. K. Theodore Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 228, footnote 5.

¹⁸ Matthew Cullen to Cullen, Avoca, Wicklow, 29 May 1876, DDA.

¹⁹ John Briody to Woodlock, Fenagh, Carrick-on-Shannon, 29 Oct 1879, Ard DA.

²⁰ John Briody to Woodlock, Fenagh, Carrick-on-Shannon, 5 Feb 1880, Ard DA.

madman". He urged the bishop to reconsider and to build on the chapel plot and he ended with the dramatic statement: "For my own part I would prefer the wilds of Florida to the parish of Fenagh with the incumbencies intended to be imposed".²¹

The situation in Fenagh demonstrated how matters could so easily turn sour for an unwary parish priest. Neither was the bishop impressed with Briody's financial skills and two years later, the P.P. was offered a transfer to the parish of Cloone. Understandably, Briody took a long, hard look at the financial implications. He complained at having to pay £45 for a house and about ten acres of land, which he thought "an extreme price". He was willing to pay £40 but he considered it "serious to pay so much from the precarious receipts of a poor locality". Once again, he was faced with the difficulty of obtaining a site for a permanent parochial residence. But obediently he told his bishop: "Yet tell me go there and I go if I were to live in a cabin for a time".²²

This unenthusiastic response must have decided the bishop against moving him, as, the following year, Briody was writing once more from Fenagh. "It is my delight to make improvement in the public churches", he stated pompously, but he proved that his delight was not matched by his expertise in financial matters. He had borrowed £50 from the bank which he was unable to repay and he was finding it difficult to pay the interest. "But I only trust you will make an equitable arrangement between my position now and what I am about to receive", he appealed to Woodlock, "Though the evil that men do lives after them, I think it is but justice that the good should be taken into consideration".²³

It was the lack of financial understanding and inability to cope which created major problems for Michael Patterson, parish priest of Enniskerry in Dublin diocese, in the late 1880's. Patterson ended up in the bankruptcy court and he claimed that this was due to the hasty action of the manager of the Hibernian Bank in Bray.²⁴ It does look, though, as if the manager did not have any option and, indeed, one may well assume that a bank manager in a small town would have been very slow to foreclose on a priest debtor. In offering his creditors a composition of four shillings in the pound, Patterson was forced to sell his furniture and household effects, valued at £506, for £400. The auctioneers advanced a loan of £500 to include pieces left unsold and Patterson gave his solicitor £475 in part payment of the composition which amounted in

²¹ John Briody to Woodlock, Fenagh, Carrick-on-Shannon, 21 Feb 1880, Ard DA.

²² John Briody to Woodlock, Foxfield, Carrick-on-Shannon, 24 Jan 1882, Ard DA.

²³ John Briody to Woodlock, Foxfield, Carrick-on-Shannon, 4 March 1883, Ard DA.

²⁴ Michael Patterson to Walsh, Enniskerry, 8 Jan 1889, DDA.

total to £700. He had no securities and the glebe house in which he resided was subject to a rent of £40 per annum. His unsecured liabilities amounted to £6550 and he was also liable to the Hibernian bank for a sum of £1000 for parochial purposes. He had two insurance policies on his life of £1000 each and some securities amounting to about £1,100. He had also raised a further debt of £250 and a creditor had taken possession of a life policy for £800.²⁵

Patterson's difficulties had arisen from his attempts to build a church and parochial house at Enniskerry. A document in the Dublin diocesan archives details the income and expenditure involved in building the church. The architects and builders' fees amounted to £2476, of which £2034 had been paid. A sum of £1450 had been borrowed from the Board of Works for work on the chapel house and £394 had been repaid.²⁶ Another document gives a detailed list of the debts incurred by Patterson and the composition offered to creditors. It is clear that the beleaguered P.P. was now way out of his depth and in a desperate attempt to retrieve the situation, he borrowed from a number of sources, whenever and wherever money was available to him. These included sums of £1500 and £1000 from his two sisters, £1000 from Sir F. Fitzwigram M.P., £500 from Joseph Marley of Castleknock, £436 from Marian Darlington of Glenageary and £914 from the manager of the National bank, Bray. There was a host of smaller debts and the grand total came to £6508. 8s. 10d. while the amount of the composition was £612. 2s.2d.²⁷

The unfortunate Patterson, called to interview by Archbishop Walsh, was still maintaining that his creditors had been unnecessarily impatient in foreclosing on the debts. Had others been as patient as the archbishop, he asserted, then the shares in which he had invested, over 1800 in number, would have helped him over his difficulties. He claimed that these shares, which had been "so ruthlessly sacrificed", had since quadrupled in value.²⁸

Patterson's career in the Dublin diocese was at an end and, although Walsh had made provision for him, the bankrupt P.P. was anxious to make a fresh start in another diocese.²⁹ He had hopes of being accepted by an Australian bishop but he did not have sufficient funds to go there. In December 1889, he wrote to Walsh to enquire if the archbishop had written to the archbishop of Melbourne but, enclosed with this, was a

²⁵ Court of Bankruptcy, Ireland, document dated 15 Jan 1889, DDA.

²⁶ Document dated 7 Dec 1888, DDA.

²⁷ Document giving details of creditors, amount of debts and amount of composition, DDA.

²⁸ Michael Patterson to Walsh, Enniskerry, 29 Oct 1869, DDA.

²⁹ Michael Patterson to Walsh, Enniskerry, 24 Nov 1889, DDA.

bill from a building contractor requesting settlement of a balance of £678. 17s. 9d.³⁰ Two weeks later, he wrote again, saying that he had been connected with Dublin diocese for over thirty years and asking for an advance loan of a few hundred pounds from the provision the archbishop had promised. He stated that he would remain at Enniskerry until the ninth of the month³¹ and he formally tendered his resignation as P.P. of Enniskerry and Cuttlestown and Adm. of Kilmacanogue.³² At Walsh's request, he agreed to remain until a successor had been appointed.³³

In the meantime, Walsh consulted W. M. Lee of Bray about a successor and Lee suggested Charles Cuddihy as "material for a good P.P.". Lee was of the opinion that there was no alternative for Patterson except a chaplaincy.³⁴ Patterson himself was still hoping to be sent to Melbourne. The ticket, even with a missionary reduction, cost £50 and Patterson's comment to Walsh in January 1890 was: "Had I thought Your Grace would have taken the view you felt justified in doing of my affairs, I would have asked my secured creditors to allow me something towards the support of a mother close upon 90 years old and a sister who is quite deaf and shortsighted. But that opportunity is past. I hope Your Grace will consider the extremely helpless position my resignation of my late parish leaves me and them in".³⁵

Later in the month, Patterson wrote again, this time asking why the archbishop had not written to Dr. Carr of Melbourne, as he had said he had done. If Walsh was not prepared to overlook the past and appoint him to another parish, then Patterson still wished to go to Melbourne, "knowing that Your Grace will intimate nothing to him that would preclude my getting a suitable appointment and make my future life among strangers an agony". He had heard that Cuddihy had been appointed to replace him in Enniskerry and he wished to leave that place immediately.³⁶

The dismissed P.P. was not receiving the message that Walsh was so clearly sending by his refusal to recommend him to another bishop. Irish bishops, including Walsh, were not slow to export their problem priests, but Walsh had obviously decided that Patterson's recklessness in financial matters made him unsuitable even for a foreign mission. Patterson persisted, repeating his request that Walsh contact Carr of Melbourne and that Walsh send him the money to leave immediately. He had a letter of

³⁰ Michael Patterson to Walsh, Enniskerry, 9 Dec 1889, DDA.

³¹ Michael Patterson to Walsh, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, 21 Dec 1889, DDA.

³² Michael Patterson to Walsh, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, Dec 1889, DDA.

³³ Michael Patterson to Walsh, Enniskerry, 29 Dec 1889, DDA.

³⁴ W. M. Lee to Walsh, Bray, 2 Jan 1890, DDA.

³⁵ Michael Patterson to Walsh, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, 15 Jan 1890, DDA.

³⁶ Michael Patterson to Walsh, Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow, 25 Jan 1890, DDA.

introduction from Croke of Cashel whom he had known for years and he had vacated Enniskerry.³⁷

Patterson may have left Enniskerry but the problems he had created remained, as his successor, Charles Cuddihy, found to his cost when he took up duties in the parish. Exactly one year later, Cuddihy sent a long letter to his archbishop in which he referred to "the financial embarrassments of this unfortunate parish" and he spoke of the "horrible incubus of parochial debt" which had oppressed him like a nightmare for the past twelve months. Having carefully scrutinised the parish finances during that year, he was forced to conclude that the parish was unable to pay off "any considerable portion" of the £1700 debt. The new church at Cuttlestown was unfinished and there was £300 owing. The archbishop, he knew, was aware of the delapidated state of Kilmacanogue chapel, which "was a danger to those who worship in it". Enniskerry church, too, was in poor condition and there were only three men in the whole district, according to the P.P., who could be used to form a committee - the sergeant of police, the schoolmaster and the village carpenter. Cuddihy further stated that he was not receiving a decent maintenance from the parish and he gave figures of £200 per annum income and expenditure of £51. 13s. 11d. Out of the £148. 6s. 1d., he had to pay £95 for the keep of a horse and three servants. He apologised to the archbishop for what he called "this long and crude statement as unpleasant to me to write as it must be to you to read". However, he promised, if the archbishop could see his way to paying off the debt, then Cuddihy would make the parish pay "instead of what it has hitherto been to you, a sorrow and a trouble".³⁸

Walsh responded to this pleading by allowing Cuddihy to borrow from the National bank a sum of money sufficient to meet the various claims against the parish. The P.P. informed the creditors that he was about to borrow this money to pay them and that the archbishop was prepared to act as guarantor. This arrangement enabled Cuddihy to have the debt considerably reduced and it seems to have becalmed the troubled parish priest by resolving the major financial problems of Enniskerry parish.³⁹

Patterson's misfortunes illustrated the dangers for a priest entering into a financial situation where he was in unfamiliar territory and did not have the competence to manage the business. In his case, it does seem that he attempted to retrieve one bad debt by incurring another and when, at the end, he found himself declared a bankrupt, he found that there was very little sympathy forthcoming from his superiors. It must be

³⁷ Michael Patterson to Walsh, Enniskerry, 26 Jan 1890, DDA.

³⁸ Charles Cuddihy to Walsh, Parochial House, Enniskerry, 28 Jan 1891, DDA.

³⁹ Charles Cuddihy P.P. to Walsh, Enniskerry, 12 Aug 1892, DDA.

stated, however, that the problem of Michael Patterson of Enniskerry was an extreme one and an isolated instance, as the evidence clearly shows that most priests, required to undertake major building projects for which they had no training, coped remarkably well with all the intricacies of financing and mortgaging and purchasing property.

Building Priests

Priests in the land purchase and building business stood to gain, too, from the various Land Acts in the last quarter of the century. The parish priest of Gowna in Ardagh diocese wrote in January 1888 that he was to buy the three acres for the curate's house at Mullinalaghta under Lord Ashbourne's Act. This Act provided for a Treasury grant of £5 million to enable tenants to borrow the whole purchase price, which would be repaid in annuities at 4% interest over a period of 49 years.⁴⁰ In the case of Gowna parish, the annual rents payable to the Land Commission amounted to £81.5s.7d. "So on that ground there will be no objection", he stated, "Of course if the £82 could be had it would be more satisfactory to purchase the fee simple direct from the landlord but there is too much debt on the place already to think of adding to it". He was also of the opinion that it would be better that he should purchase from the landlord himself through the Land Commission and then, afterwards, make over the place to the bishop or any others the bishop might nominate.⁴¹

Similarly, Patrick Reddy, P.P. of Keadue, informed the bishop in 1891 that, under the terms of the late Land Purchase Act, it was possible to purchase the glebe land from the landlord. Reddy was anxious to have this done as it would make the bishop and other trustees absolute owners of the glebe. Then, if the bishop thought it desirable, he could alienate a portion of the land for sites for various purposes, such as building schools, a convent or a cemetery. He requested the bishop to contact Lord Kingston to seek his co-operation in the scheme, pointing out that the tax on Reddy himself would not be any greater than it then was.⁴²

Bishop Woodlock himself seems to have been particularly knowledgeable in the matter of building grants, although the Office of Public Works was not satisfied that his request for a loan in 1884 to build a second house in St. Mary's parish, Athlone, was in order. The secretary wrote to the bishop pointing out that a sum of £600 had already

⁴⁰ L. P. Curtis Jr., *Coercion and Conciliation in Ireland 1880-92*, (London 1963), pp.44-5.

⁴¹ Letter in M. Corcoran's hand, Gowna, 18 Jan 1888, Ard DA.

⁴² P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, Carrick-on-Shannon, 18 Oct 1891, Ard DA.

been advanced for a parochial residence at St. Mary's and stated that the present application was for a loan to purchase another house for a similar purpose.⁴³

Undoubtedly, the availability of such loans eased considerably the burden on priests in providing the requisite finance. But it also, at times, enticed them into purchasing more ambitiously than might otherwise have been the case. For instance, Thomas McGeoy of Loughduff could purchase a house for £300, being confident that he would obtain two thirds of the amount in grants from the state.⁴⁴ It also meant that rents for curates were considerably reduced, as Farrell Duffy of Ballinamuck pointed out in a letter of March 1893. He was reporting on a visit from an inspector from the Board of Works in response to an application for a grant of £100 towards the erection of a curate's residence. If the Board were to sanction the grant, it would mean that the curate's rent would be 10s. per annum with rates and county cess.⁴⁵

Many priests expended an enormous amount of time and energy in various building projects and for them, perhaps, the parochial residence or the church or school was their lasting memorial. These priests took to the building business with relish and they involved themselves in all the minutiae of the task. This approach is well exemplified in the case of Thomas Hourican, a curate at Ballintogher, Ardagh diocese. Making his case to Woodlock in June 1884, Hourican stated that the house in which he was living was neither good nor healthy and the house, with a small garden, was costing him £10 a year. He suggested building a glebe house beside the chapel. He thought that £100 would be enough to borrow from the Board of Works; otherwise, the interest, ground rent and taxes would be too much for a curate to pay. But, he added, "By myself superintending the whole work, a house could be built cheaply". He then gave details of sand and stones which were available near the site and he assured the bishop that the half parish would contribute £100.⁴⁶

In 1863, a Fr. Blake wrote to Dr. Yore, vicar general of Dublin diocese, about his deceased cousin, Matthew Fagan, P.P. of Kilquade. According to Blake, Fagan had spent much of his own private money in endeavouring to procure a lease in trust forever of the grounds "which are now parochial property". Fagan had worked hard over a number of years to achieve this and the grounds, which were "in a miserable state", he had reclaimed and left in the best of condition. He had also laboured hard to build the parochial house at Kilquade, "travelling and begging for that object". The

⁴³ T. Latimer to Woodlock, Office of Public Works, Dublin, 6 May 1884, Ard DA.

⁴⁴ T. McGeoy to Woodlock, Loughduff, 23 Feb [1882], Ard DA.

⁴⁵ Farrell Duffy to Woodlock, Ballinamuck, 15 March 1893, Ard DA.

⁴⁶ Thomas Hourican to Woodlock, Ballintogher, Collooney, 27 June 1884, Ard DA.

purpose of Blake's letter was to try and arrange that Fagan's successor who would "enjoy the comfort of the house" would be made to pay the debts that Fagan had incurred.⁴⁷

In the diocese of Raphoe, James McFadden, parish priest of Gweedore, undertook building projects with gusto, as he set about organising such details as the quarrying of the stone. He proposed to employ a professional quarryman and then he would require each household to provide a man free for a week. In this way, five men would be engaged in quarrying for 13 or 14 weeks. He also ordered each household to leave 10 barrels of lime on the site. McFadden had a query for the bishop. He had found a plot nearby in which there were deposits of red clay or iron ore and he was in receipt of £6 for each shipment. He wished to know if this money was part of parish income.⁴⁸

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the practice had grown of clerics visiting the United States to collect money for Irish church building projects. This was obviously a suggestion made by his bishop to Patrick Reddy of Keadue in 1883. Reddy, an able and articulate man, was having difficulty in meeting parish debts. He was not at all enthusiastic about the suggestion to undertake a fund-raising trip to the U.S., remarking that there was no duty more distasteful to him than that of collecting money. However, if he could ever be convinced that the trip would be worthwhile, then he would overcome his innate repugnance to the task. He felt that the U.S. just then was overrun by collectors, "political, clerical, and pseudo-political and clerical". He agreed to consider the matter and contact some friends in Canada and the U.S. He thought that Woodlock should seek permission in advance from the archbishops of New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago. "I do not dream", he commented wryly, "that after Oscar Wilde, Serjeant Ballantine, A.M. Sullivan and [others of] such ability that I would succeed in getting one dollar as a public lecturer".⁴⁹

That Woodlock was still pressing him to go is clear from Reddy's next letter, in which he said that he would go to collect funds towards the £1100 due on Kilronan presbytery, "and more if I can get it for repair of the parochial church". The P.P. repeated that it was important that he have the permission of the various American bishops beforehand. "I have many friends in America and Canada and I know from experience that unless a collector be unopposed by the bishop and priests, he has a very bad chance", Reddy remarked. He had heard that Fr. Boylan of Kilmore, "a good *ex*

⁴⁷ P. Blake to Yore, Parochial House, Navan, 10 Feb 1863, DDA.

⁴⁸ James McFadden to McDevitt, Bunbeg, Letterkenny, 7 Nov 1875, RDA.

⁴⁹ P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, 2 Jan 1883, Ard DA.

tempore orator and who knows America very well", had been almost a total failure there. He concluded by saying that it was a very serious undertaking and that he would consider it if Woodlock obtained the necessary permissions and "if not, not".⁵⁰

Reddy's doubts persisted and his growing reluctance to undertake the trip is quite evident in his next letter. "The nearer the prospect of my going to America *in forma pauperis* grows, the greater becomes my anxiety lest the speculation would be a failure", he wrote. He was concentrating his efforts at the moment on repairing the church at Keadue. "As for the debt on the house", he continued, "I am trying to forget it - as far as it can be forgotten by me for the present".⁵¹ It would seem that Reddy's reluctance prevailed and that he did not, in fact, travel to the United States.

Of course, the most convenient and the easiest manner of providing a parochial residence was that where either the house was built from existing resources or where there was a straightforward transfer of houses and lands which had previously been the private property of individual clerics. As is evident from the study of clerical wills, such transfer of property happened in a great number of cases. And these transactions could sometimes lead to disputes among priests. Thus, in the parish of Mullahoran, in Ardagh, John Corcoran handed over his farm of eight acres, which cost over £60, to trustees to be used as parochial property, pointing out that a house could be built on five acres.⁵² When Corcoran was transferred to another parish, he claimed £100 from his successor, Thomas McGeoy, for the dwelling house and outhouses which he had erected there. McGeoy alleged that the dwelling house and most of the outhouses had been built by one of Corcoran's predecessors and of the £100, McGeoy claimed that £60 was a compensation to Corcoran for a claim made by a predecessor, Canon Monahan.⁵³

Some of the clerical landowners struck a hard bargain. In the parish of Scrabby, in Ardagh diocese, the parish priest was anxious to build a house there as a parochial residence. He was of the opinion that it would cost £700 with a yearly rent of £26 for fourteen acres of land. Neil O'Flanagan, V.G. of the diocese, was of the opinion that the Board of Works would not lend on so short a lease and he posed the pertinent question as to who would pay the interest on the loan as well as pay the rent. He then suggested, as an alternative, a site near the chapel. This site was owned by Fr. Grey of the diocese and he was in the process of selling. He was looking for over £80

⁵⁰ P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, 6 Jan 1883, Ard DA.

⁵¹ P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, 2 April 1883, Ard DA.

⁵² J. Corcoran to Woodlock, Loughduff, 18 Sept 1891, Ard DA.

⁵³ Thomas McGeoy to Woodlock, Loughduff, Co. Cavan, 3 Jan 1893, Ard DA.

and O'Flanagan said that Grey would not part with the property for less, even as a site for a parochial house.⁵⁴

Patrick Daly, parish priest of Mevagh in Raphoe, spoke of the difficulties he was having in 1877 with a Fr. Doherty, who had purchased a farm on which a parochial house was to be built. Daly promised to pay Doherty £50 of the purchase money and whatever expenses were due for improvements carried out within a year. Daly had received no reply and "to make things more difficult", he complained, "there's a woman living in the old house on the farm, brought there by Fr. Doherty and with his sanction who is giving every annoyance". Furthermore, said Daly, the old woman was dishonest and he had caught her with "a bag full of wedges used and required in the chapel for scaffolding bringing them home to burn".⁵⁵

An interesting situation arose in the parish of Cappawhite in Cashel, where the P.P., Michael Callanan, built the houses for the parish priest and curate on his own site and then, left all in his will for a religious foundation in Cappawhite. Archbishop Croke decided that there was no need for a religious community there and he donated the houses and land to succeeding parish priests. The Commissioners of Charitable Bequests did not become aware of this until 1913 and they decided that Croke as trustee had violated the terms of the will. The matter was settled eventually when Harty became archbishop and an arrangement was made whereby the P.P. paid £400 towards the education of six boys from Cappawhite parish at Doon C.B.S.⁵⁶ In the same diocese, the parochial house at Moycarney was built on a site of six acres, owned and funded by the parish priest, Nicholas Duggan and other houses, such as that at Ballingarry, were built from funds made available from religious foundations.⁵⁷

Reluctant Builders

Not all priests, of course, had the desire or the ability to cope with the demands of purchasing, building and fundraising. Priests like Reddy, mentioned above, who expressed a distaste for fundraising were rare enough, as most would have accepted it as a legitimate part of their function as pastor. There were others who simply did not wish to take on themselves the trouble and anxiety of so great a project. Patrick Mooney of St. Audeon's in Dublin, not the most amicable of parish priests, explained

⁵⁴ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 26 Dec 1881, Ard DA.

⁵⁵ P. Daly to McDevitt, Mevagh, 22 Dec 1877, RDA.

⁵⁶ Index of Cashel clergy, Walter Skehan, CDA.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

to Archbishop Cullen in 1864 "the insuperable difficulty" of building a parochial house in the High St. parish - firstly, there was no ground to build on and secondly, the rent for which the church was then liable was "so murderous" that he could not undertake to pay any more.⁵⁸ It is fair to suppose that Mooney, a most cantakerous individual, who had difficulties with a series of curates, was suppressing the third and real reason - his own unwillingness to undertake the work.

When the insistence of the bishop to provide a parochial residence was matched by the stubborn refusal of the parish priest to become involved in providing it, there were the ingredients for long and tortuous disputes. This is well exemplified in the case of William W. Brady, P.P. of Aghavas, Ardagh diocese, whose reluctance to build, despite the insistence of his bishop, Bartholomew Woodlock, led to a dispute which developed into quite a saga over a number of years in the 1880's.

The bishop's preference was for a house, which would accommodate both parish priest and curates. Brady, writing from a guest house in Dublin in November 1884, expressed his opposition to the notion of a common residence and he appealed to Woodlock to build a house for the curate only. "I have known too much of the evil consequences of parish priests and curates living together not to be forced to say that I cannot consent to put myself in such a position, especially under present circumstances". The present circumstances referred to the fact that he had at that time as curate John Galligan, who had the reputation of being difficult and who had been moved a number of times. Parish priests and curates living together was "a fruitful source of sin - strife and enmity between priests where none would be otherwise", Brady argued forcefully, "It has been tried in many dioceses and has proved to be the cause of much unhappiness to both parish priests and curates and endless trouble to the Bishop". He then instanced dioceses, such as Elphin and Kilmore, where bishops were encouraging the building of separate houses. He stressed that it used to be the rule in Meath for curates to live with parish priests but now they were allowed to lodge out of the parochial house. The P.P. then tried to dissuade the bishop by advancing more local arguments. A parochial house in Aghavas would cost £30 a year, interest on borrowed money, and keeping a curate would double housekeeping expenses. An additional servant would have to be employed and the house "constantly supplied with fresh meat". He made much of the fresh meat argument, saying: "When a curate pays for fresh meat, he must have it" and to attempt to supply it in a place so remote could mean time wasted in travelling to Mohill or Arva - "half the time of the man and horse would be taken up in getting fresh meat which the P.P. very often does without on

⁵⁸ Patrick Mooney to Cullen, 22 High St., 8 July 1864, DDA.

account of the great inconvenience in procuring it". Brady claimed that his parish receipts were not much more than £140 a year and that it would be impossible to meet such expenses out of this income. "There is not so poor a parish in the diocese or in any other doing it", he protested.⁵⁹

Some days later, Brady returned to the theme, giving details of a farm which would be suitable for a curate's house. He said that he was waiting until the spring when he expected to get it "at half the purchase". This would enable the curate to keep a house "as his receipts otherwise would not enable him to do so". The curate was certainly more in need of a house than he himself, said Brady, adding the significant comment, "Bad as Your Lordship thinks mine is". He stated his intention of calling at the Board of Works to see if the purchase money, or part of it, could be obtained there.⁶⁰

Back home and with his health improved, the parish priest wrote again to the bishop. "I believe I do not exaggerate when I say the worry and fatigue of building a house would seriously endanger my health, if not my life", he stated somewhat melodramatically. His curate, Galligan, had "health and strength to spare" and could "get up a curate's house cheaply". Brady would contribute £10 and he suggested that some of the money lodged in his own and the bishop's name might go towards purchasing the site. And once again, he emphasised that the necessity for a curate's residence was much more pressing than that of the P.P.⁶¹

As in many other matters concerning diocesan administration, Woodlock, who had come to the bishopric from All Hallows' College, felt the need to consult one of his senior clerics, Neil O'Flanagan of Granard. O'Flanagan's opinion was that, since it was difficult to find suitable lodgings for a curate in Aghavas, it was a good idea to build a house which would "*pro tem* seat the curate" and maybe afterwards, look to the parochial residence. "In a parish like Aghavas", he wrote, "it is not required to build an expensive house or borrow much money from the Board of Works" - a statement which has its own interesting implications. "If Fr. Galligan alerted himself", said O'Flanagan, "he could get materials, stone and sand raised voluntarily by the people and a respectable builder without the intervention of an architect would build a house very cheaply". He saw nothing wrong with the curate holding seven acres of land during his stay in the parish without further title and by levying a small cess on

⁵⁹ Wm. W. Brady to Woodlock, Mrs. Sweeney's, 1 Lincoln Place, Dublin, 12 Nov 1884, Ard DA.

⁶⁰ Wm. W. Brady to Woodlock, Mrs. Sweeney's, 1 Lincoln Place, Dublin, 15 Nov 1884, Ard DA.

⁶¹ Wm. W. Brady to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 21 Nov 1884 Ard DA.

parishioners of 1s. in the pound, they would require little or no money from the Board of Works.⁶²

That this notion of building a house on the cheap was conveyed to Brady by the bishop is evident from the P.P.'s next letter, in which he promised that, with Galligan, he would immediately begin the search for a suitable site. He gave details of one site that he had investigated. The stations would be over the following week and Galligan would have time to look after stones and other matters.⁶³ And the following week, Brady duly wrote to remind the bishop that he had promised a sum of £20 should the building commence. Also, if the bishop would sell the farm in his possession to the parish for £60, the Board of Works would lend £40. Brady himself would contribute £10 as promised but he warned that the interest on this and on the borrowed money would "leave the farm very dear on the curate".⁶⁴

But to the bishop's chagrin, the curate Galligan did not seem any more willing to take on the role of builder. He first of all complained that he was so badly paid that he could not afford to keep a house. Then on the matter of housebuilding, he had this interesting observation to make: "I need not tell Your Lordship that parochial houses and their sites are at the present day in many instances open to severe criticism and will no doubt in the future history of Co. Leitrim be objects of deserved censure. The selection of the parochial house here especially requires prudence, taste and economy". Since the bishop was leaving shortly for Rome, Galligan expressed a wish to see him to make arrangements "for once and for all" and he added confidentially: "I may tell you of course in private that the P.P. intends never to live in the new house".⁶⁵

A site was agreed on and Brady, however reluctantly, began by looking at other curates' houses in the vicinity. He was enthusiastic about a curates' residence that he had seen in Carrigallen and he gave details, including measurements. He also reported that no architect had been employed, as the house had been built from the plan of a house occupied by a doctor in the town. Likewise, there was no contract, the house having been built by two masons living locally and the carpenter was also a parishioner. Brady recommended to the bishop to take a lease of the whole farm and to borrow what was required of the purchase money. He thought it time enough to apply for a loan when it could be shown that one third of the work was completed. "This the

⁶² N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 23 Nov 1884, Ard DA.

⁶³ Wm. W. Brady to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 26 Nov 1884, Ard DA.

⁶⁴ Wm Wm Brady to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 1 Dec 1884, Ard DA.

⁶⁵ J. Galligan to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 4 Dec 1884, Ard DA.

parish ought to do and will, I am sure," said the P.P., ending with an invitation to the bishop to come and look again at the site.⁶⁶

Evidently, the bishop was satisfied as a site was purchased from Thomas Bruton, an R.I.C. sergeant, on 1st January 1885 for £70. By August of this same year, the work had still not commenced and Galligan wrote to inform the bishop that the P.P. was staying at the Imperial Hotel in Lisdoonvarna, from where he had written to say that the spas were "expelling his old enemy rheumatism".⁶⁷

March 1886 saw another flurry of letters to explain the inactivity of the curate. Galligan still had reservations and, while he had taken possession of the farm, he had made no move to commence building. Brady explained this by saying that building a house in Aghavas "must necessarily be tedious as it is simply impossible to raise any considerable sum in the present distressed state of the parish". He now felt that it was only by "gratuitous labour, assisted by a little money" that anything could be done.⁶⁸

The bishop's response was to give Galligan notice of transfer to another parish. Galligan interpreted this, no doubt correctly, as a sign of episcopal displeasure at his having made no progress with the building of the house and he promised to commence work at once. Brady wrote in praise of his curate that "no man would succeed better in Aghavas in accomplishing the task".⁶⁹ Woodlock remained unimpressed and handed the job back to the P.P. Brady was dismayed and he protested: "I am now 26 years on the mission in this diocese and have not been much at my ease any part of the time". He went on to supply the bishop with a list of his ailments and then argued: "As the house is for the curate and the land is for the curate, I think he should incur all the responsibility". He repeated his reluctance to borrow money as most of the people were in debt and he could not press them for money - "They would say we had little sympathy for them in their distress and it would be hard on the curate to meet a yearly instalment".⁷⁰

Another year passed and the parish priest continued to fight a rearguard action. He wrote to Woodlock in March 1887 to say that he did not feel that he had sufficient strength to continue on as pastor. He was fifty-six years of age, he had suffered much and he would pray for the bishop all the days of his life if he would allow him to retire.

⁶⁶ Wm. W. Brady to Woodlock, Aghavas, 11 Dec 1884; 23 Dec 1884; Ard DA.

⁶⁷ J. Galligan to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 26 Aug 1885, Ard DA.

⁶⁸ Wm. W. Brady to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 4 March 1886, Ard DA.

⁶⁹ Wm. W. Brady to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 7 March 1886, Ard DA.

⁷⁰ Wm. W. Brady to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 14 March 1886, Ard DA.

He was prepared to give up his house and land to his successor and the value of this to him would amount to most of his pension. There was a good deal of work to be done, including the building of the parochial house and schools, and it required a more active man.⁷¹

If Woodlock was anxious to have the building of the Aghavas parochial house completed, then the choice of Michael Nangle as curate was astonishing, since Nangle came to Aghavas with a history of alcohol addiction and a consistent record of bad debts. For his part, Nangle would have been anxious to impress his bishop with a show of industry. He reported in May 1887 that there was "a deficiency of stones", that the sand could be had at any time and that the lime, burned and contracted for, could be supplied at a day's notice. He had also "alerted four masons".⁷² There were, however, further complications and in August, Nangle wrote to say that nothing could be done with the house and he agreed with the bishop that it would be unwise to commence building until the lease had been completed. In addition, a new Land Bill was expected and this would substantially change the terms of the lease to the advantage of the bishop.⁷³

One year later and William Brady's wish was granted. He was at last relieved of the unwanted burden of building a parochial house and he went into retirement. He was replaced by Francis Duignan⁷⁴ and it can be safely assumed that at the top of the list of instructions for the new P.P. was the completion of the parochial house.

The case of William Brady highlights the difficulties faced by a priest who found the whole building process distasteful or who did not see it as a necessary part of his essential duties. In Brady's case, it is clear that he simply did not feel able to take upon himself what he saw as an onerous task. He was not a man who enjoyed good health and he was perfectly content to continue to reside in his own house. His energies were employed in a campaign of obfuscation and evasion in order to avoid the task of building a parochial residence. He was faced, however, with the demands of a superior who clearly saw it as his responsibility that a suitable residence be provided for the clergy of the parish and who persisted in his demands - in this instance with an insistence that amounted to harrassment. In the end, the decision of the beleaguered parish priest to retire rather than agree to undertake the building of a house underlined

⁷¹ Wm. W. Brady to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 13 March 1887, Ard DA.

⁷² M. Nangle to Woodlock, Aghavas, 20 May 1887, Ard DA.

⁷³ M. Nangle to Woodlock, Aghavas, 1 Aug 1887, Ard DA.

⁷⁴ F. Duignan to Woodlock, Agavas, 28 Feb 1890, ArdDA.

his distaste for the project and his determination to continue to resist his bishop's demands.

Cost and Quality of Parochial Houses

So what kind of houses did these priests build? How much did the houses cost? How did they compare with the dwellings of the parishioners?

With regard to cost and quality of the housing that was provided for the secular clergy in the second half of the nineteenth century, let it be said straightaway that, in general, priests occupied houses that were superior to the average dwellings of their parishioners. As early as the 1840's, James Maher, writing on the subject to his nephew, Paul Cullen, then rector of the Irish College, Rome, had this to say: "In travelling thru' the country I have observed with pain that the relative position of the people and Clergy has been greatly changed. The people have become very much poorer. And the Clergy have adopted a more expensive style of living. The best Catholic house in each Parish and the best style of living appears to be the Priests".⁷⁵

Many of these parochial houses, which were built in the nineteenth century, are still to be seen today. They were built to last and they were spacious, comfortable, solid buildings. Sites were carefully chosen and the houses were usually built on the high ground, a metaphor perhaps for the increased status and growing influence of the nineteenth century Catholic priest. The traveller, Hurlbert, described Canon Keller's house at Youghal as "an extremely good house.... well placed in the most interesting quarter of the town".⁷⁶ Rev. F. Lynch of Ardagh diocese, writing to thank his bishop for his appointment to the parish of St. Mary's, Athlone, was delighted with the church and house - "It is a gem of a church..... The presbytery is also very nice and comfortable and the site very healthy- overlooking the town and surrounding country".⁷⁷

Costs varied from one district to another and more often, the houses were built to the particular priest's requirements and taste rather than from any considerations of surroundings or relative standards. Hoppen states that, between 1800 and 1867, at least 600 houses were built at an average of £500.⁷⁸ Evidence from other sources

⁷⁵ quoted in Emmet Larkin, *op. cit.*, p.20.

⁷⁶ Hurlbert, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 61.

⁷⁷ F. Lynch to Woodlock, St. Mary's, Athlone, 15 Sept 1881, Ard DA.

⁷⁸ Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

would support this estimate, at least to the 1870's. £500 is the exact sum quoted by Denis Grey for the building of Drumshambo presbytery.⁷⁹ Thomas O'Connor paid £200 for a house in Templemore, Co. Tipperary, in 1854, which he then left as a parochial residence.⁸⁰ A similar amount was paid by Fr. Hally, P.P. of Dungarvan, for the house in which he resided in 1861.⁸¹ In his will of 1872, William O'Dwyer, P.P. of Doon, states that the presbytery cost £850, of which £300 came from the parish, £200 from the Doon chapel fund and £350 was subscribed by O'Dwyer himself.⁸² Richard Galvin, P.P. of Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow, put the cost of the curate's house at Aughrim in 1876 at £571.16s. 3d. with an additional £90 or £100 for stabling. All of this was subscribed by the people who also provided horse work and some labour free.⁸³ In Cashel diocese, in the 1850's, William Mullaly built a parochial house at Rossacroe for £400,⁸⁴ while in Dublin diocese in 1876, Matthew Collier of Avoca anticipated spending £700 on extending his present dwelling.⁸⁵ At the other extreme, Bishop Edward Kernan of Clogher was stated to have spent £4,215 on a dwelling house.⁸⁶

The diocesan archives in Ardagh contain a number of letters dealing with various aspects of house building, including costs. Thomas Cahill stated that he built a house at Ballinagar without any assistance from the parish.⁸⁷ If this is so, it is difficult to understand how the building was financed, since Cahill gave the figure of £680 as the total estimate for the house.⁸⁸ A curate at Ballintogher accused Cahill of extravagance in building the house there, alleging that Cahill was the cause of having a larger house built than was intended at first.⁸⁹ There is other evidence, however, to suggest that Cahill was certainly cost conscious. He was responsible, for the building of a house at Cloone in 1881, for which the contract was £55. He does seem, in this case at least, to have been very aware of the condition of his parish, stating that it was "absolute necessity" which forced him to begin there under very unfavourable

⁷⁹ D. Grey to Woodlock, Edgeworthstown, 4 Jan [no year], Ard DA.

⁸⁰ Thomas O'Connor P.P. Templemore, visitation report 2-3 Aug 1854, CDA.

⁸¹ Matthew Butler on priests, Ms. 9506, NL

⁸² Geo. Butler to Leahy, The Palace, Limerick, 18 May 1872, CDA.

⁸³ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 23 April 1876, DDA.

⁸⁴ Notes compiled by Thomas O'Carroll, c. 1841 - 50, courtesy Mark Tierney, O.S.B.

⁸⁵ Matthew Collier to Cullen, Avoca, Wicklow, 29 May 1876, DDA.

⁸⁶ Copy of probate of will of Edward Kernan, Clogher papers, NIPRO. Kernan was bishop of Clogher 1824-44 and came from Enniskillen from a family of successful business people (Peadar Livingstone, *The Fermanagh Story*, (Enniskillen 1969), p.223).

⁸⁷ Thomas Cahill to Woodlock, 17 Sept 1882, Ard DA.

⁸⁸ Thomas Cahill to Woodlock, 20 Aug 1887, Ard DA.

⁸⁹ T. Boylan to Woodlock, Ballintogher, Sligo, 23 April 1887, Ard DA.

circumstances. "I am sorry to inform Your Lordship", he wrote, "there are 17 evictions arranged for Friday next - nearly all in this very poor district".⁹⁰

At Mullahoran, Co. Cavan, John Corcoran borrowed £300 to build a curate's house in 1884, although he was hoping also to pay off the debt on the farm of eight acres, which he had purchased so that the land would belong to the curate after the house was built.⁹¹

Clearly, costs would have risen as the century wore on, but there was no attempt to cut back on expenditure on parochial building. In a statement of parish finances dated 1881, £1,466.18s. was the sum mentioned by John McErlain, parish priest of Ballymoney in the the diocese of Down and Connor, for building a parochial house, offices and a boundary wall. The total expenditure for parochial buildings, including a church, came to £12,284.12s.3d., of which £4,360 was collected by McErlain after an eighteen month tour of Ireland and Britain.⁹² In Elphin diocese in 1894, £1,365.3s.8d. was the estimated cost of building a presbytery, stables and outhouses at Boyle, Co. Roscommon.⁹³

Similar sums of money were spent on the purchase of suitable houses and farms and, presumably, further sums were spent on repairs, decoration and structural changes to existing dwellings. In Ardagh diocese in 1881, Michael Corcoran was contemplating the purchase of a house and fourteen acres of land for £700,⁹⁴ while John Briody of Foxfield, Carrick-on-Shannon paid the bargain price of £45 for a house and ten acres of land at Cloone in 1882.⁹⁵ In the poorer parish of Loughduff, Thomas McGeoy paid £300 for a house and farm, expecting to receive two thirds or £200 as a loan.⁹⁶

In 1889, Bishop McCormack of Galway paid £1,500 for the lease of his house, paying £50 rent per annum, and it is described by Wilfred Scawen Blunt as as "a most comfortable house".⁹⁷ Blunt, who travelled the country during the years of the land agitation, visited many houses of priests and bishops and he has comments to make on

⁹⁰ Thomas Cahill to Woodlock, Cloone, 2 June 1881, Ard DA.

⁹¹ J. Corcoran to Woodlock, Loughduff, Cavan, 10 May 1884, Ard DA.

⁹² *A statement of accounts and a few facts concerning Ballymoney and Derrykeighan* (Ballymoney 1881), quoted in Ambrose Macaulay, **Patrick Dorrian, Bishop of Down and Connor 1865-85**, (Dublin 1987), pp. 124-5.

⁹³ Estimate from John Whelan, Strokestown, 31 Aug 1894, EDA.

⁹⁴ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 26 Dec 1881, Ard DA.

⁹⁵ John Briody to Woodlock, Foxfield, Carrick-on-Shannon, 24 Jan 1882, Ard DA.

⁹⁶ T. McGeoy to Woodlock, Presbytery, Loughduff, 23 Feb [no year], Ard DA.

⁹⁷ Wilfred S. Blunt, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

some of them. The Archbishop's House at Rutland Place, Dublin, he describes as "a good one", remarking that it was bequeathed by Cardinal Cullen.⁹⁸ Patrick Duggan, bishop of Clonfert, who made a great impression on Blunt because of his simplicity and his concern for the poor, lived in "a poor little house in the town [Loughrea] - they call it the Palace - waited on by an old peasant woman and a little foundling boy".⁹⁹

Fr. Mangan in the Glengarriff area lived in a little house high up in the hills,¹⁰⁰ Blunt writes, while Fr. O'Connor of Firies had a house which had been a good one but had been "allowed to run to seed".¹⁰¹ James MacFadden, P.P. of Gweedore, was a man who attracted a good deal of media attention in his time because of his prominent part in Land League activities. He was visited, too, by Blunt, who, commenting first on the condition of the people, stated that he was reminded more and more of a Bedouin camp. MacFadden's house, however, he thought "the reverse of all this, smart and new, like a villa at Horley".¹⁰² This is borne out by William Hurlbert, a more hostile observer, who pronounced MacFadden's house as "quite the best structure in the place after the chapel and the hotel". The house was built of stone, with a neat side porch and surrounded by a long, stone wall, "well coped with unhewn stone".¹⁰³ The local sergeant agreed with Hurlbert that it was the best house in the parish and he implied that it had been built from money that MacFadden had received from the government as compensation for the flooding of a chapel at Gweedore in August 1880.¹⁰⁴ It may be that MacFadden shared the opinion of a Clogher priest who thought that no priest should be expected to live in a house which "might satisfy the wants of a small farmer" but "was altogether insufficient as a residence for a gentleman".¹⁰⁵

That Hurlbert's observations were influenced by the political attitudes of individual clerics is clear from his comments on his visit to Dr. John Healy, bishop of Clonfert. Healy, who was well known for his opposition to all forms of political agitation, is described by Hurlbert as a "frank, dignified, unaffected man" and as a "type of the high-minded and courageous ecclesiastics" who have refused to "subordinate their duties to the policies and convenience of an organisation absolutely controlled by Mr. Parnell..." Accordingly, Healy's residence, which was

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 42.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 66.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 112

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 116.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* p. 54.

¹⁰³ Hurlbert, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 159 - 60.

¹⁰⁵ Rev. K. McKenna to Donnelly, 10 March 1882, quoted in Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

quite substantial, is described as "handsome and commodious but simple and unpretentious", set on grounds which were well planted and "commanding a wide view of a most agreeable country".¹⁰⁶

By way of contrast, Patrick Coen of Woodford, in the same diocese, was a well known political activist. According to Hurlbert, Coen occupied an excellent house on 23 acres of land provided by the late Lord Clanricarde with a rent fixed at "the absurd and nominal sum" of two guineas a year. Hurlbert also states that, although Coen "enjoys the mansion and has a substantial income from the parish", he was still two and a half years in arrears with his rent. The valuation of this holding was £7. 15s. for the land and £5 for the house.¹⁰⁷

As has already been noted, the lot of Catholic curates improved considerably during the second half of the century. The situation with regard to their income was regularised and there was a marked improvement in their living standards and quality of accommodation. William W. Brady, the embattled P.P. of Aghavas, Co. Leitrim, gives details of a curate's residence built at Carrigallen in 1884. It measured 16 feet by 31 feet and was 17 feet high. The staircase was in the centre of the house with a good parlour, 16 feet by 13 feet, on one side and, on the other, a kitchen and library. Upstairs, there were three bedrooms, one of them the size of the parlour. As Brady pointed out, this house could easily have been enlarged by building a wing two storeys high.¹⁰⁸ In the same diocese, Thomas Cahill of Ballinagar expressed satisfaction with curate John Galligan and, consequently, he was going to make a cottage and gardens available to the curate rent free.¹⁰⁹

In Dublin diocese, James Redmond, P.P. of Arklow, had bought, in the early 1850's, a small cottage and four acres of land outside the town to house the curate but he had refused to let it to any curate directly because of the "frequent removal of curates". In 1852, he had a change of heart and, because one of the two curates "had no ground for the manure of his horse", Redmond was prepared to let him have one small field to grow potatoes and also straw to litter his horses. The other curate could then have the remaining three acres, on which to graze two cows and to grow "a sufficiency of potatoes and straw". The parish, Redmond stressed, was sure to give the curate hay enough to feed four cows and a horse and, in this year, he would sell £40 worth of hay, as he had no horse until recently. The land was so good that the

¹⁰⁶ Hurlbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 112 - 13.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 116.

¹⁰⁸ Wm. W. Brady to Woodlock, Aghavas, Carrigallen, 11 Dec 1884, Ard DA.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Cahill to Woodlock, Ballinagar, 30 March 1886, Ard DA.

former curate used to sell a considerable share of stock and butter, "sometimes to the distraction of his attention from more important matters".¹¹⁰

In the parish of Rathdrum, Co. Wicklow, the P.P. Richard Galvin described the house being built for the curate in Aughrim in 1876. The plot measured 62 feet by 192 feet affording a "fair size garden". The rent was £3. 12s. per year. The curate had one acre of the church plot which he grazed and planted with potatoes. Indeed, Galvin felt, the curate should occupy the land to prevent it being turned into a commons by the villagers. He complained that the present curate, Fr. Ryan, was refusing to pay the rent of the church plots which he was grazing, tilling and occupying.¹¹¹

Conclusion

As the century progressed, then, the quality and standard of priests' houses improved so that, by century's end, it could be said that almost all, whether parish priest or curate, were comfortably housed. The diocesan priests had thrown themselves enthusiastically into the building programme and, for the most part, had proved themselves able financial administrators with a capacity to absorb quickly the most intricate details of planning, funding, banking and the purchase of property. It must be said that it is difficult at times to distinguish between church ownership of property and private ownership. In most cases, the property was acquired in the first instance by the individual priest, who undertook the responsibility of all the business connected with the building, even to the extent of underwriting loans. This was done on the clear understanding that the property would revert to ecclesiastical ownership, either during the lifetime of the priest or at the time of the priest's death, when the property was willed either directly to the bishop or to the succeeding parish priest. In some cases, however, it is not at all clear as to where ownership lay and, as is evident from a study of clerical wills, there was a considerable amount of property acquired by priests which they saw as their own private estate to be disposed of as they saw fit.

As regards the bishops, the task facing them was two fold. Firstly, they had to ensure that adequate and appropriate accommodation be made available, which meant, in some cases, acquiring property for building new houses and, in other cases, renovating existing residences. Secondly, they had to ensure that all property was properly vested in diocesan trustees and to prevent transference of what they saw as

¹¹⁰ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 12 Feb 1854, DDA.

¹¹¹ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 23 April 1876, DDA.

ecclesiastical property to the family of individual priests. No doubt, it was episcopal anxiety about the latter which prompted the introduction of legislation at the Synod of Thurles, by which parish priests were obliged to make wills and to deposit copies in diocesan archives. By the century's end, the bishops could have been well satisfied with the manner in which the clergy had responded to their urgings, as they must have been heartened by the fact that parochial property was now safely vested in ecclesiastical trustees.

Chapter Six

Social Life and Pastimes

What, then, was the reality awaiting the newly ordained priests as they left the more sheltered environs of their colleges and took their posts as chaplains, teachers and curates in the dioceses of nineteenth century Ireland? The Cashel diocesan archives have two interesting documents, which offer an insight into the ordinary life and routine duties of the curate in the rural parish. These are the diaries kept by the O'Carroll brothers, Thomas and James. The daily record of events kept by Thomas is for 1846, the year in which he moved from the curacy of Anacarty to the curacy of Clonoulty, while James was also curate at Clonoulty, with his brother as P.P., when he kept his records for the years 1862-64.

From a reading of Thomas' diary of 1846, one can understand his almost obsessive preoccupation with weather conditions, as so much of his time was taken up in travelling to stations and to sick calls. These calls were made either on horseback or by horse and car and this round of duty was interrupted only by the occasional visits from family and friends or by the visits which Thomas himself made to his friends and acquaintances.

This description of O'Carroll's normal round of duties is mirrored in a diary kept by a Dublin curate, Richard Colahan, for the years 1888-89. What may well be the standard daily routine for a curate in an urban area is outlined by Colahan in an entry in his diary dated 13 February 1889. He rose at 6.30 a.m. and made his meditation. He celebrated mass and heard confessions. Then he attended sick calls in the hospital and the district and he visited a parishioner. After attending to his spiritual duties, he took time off to visit his mother and sister at their home. He then returned, read his office and said night prayers.¹

James O'Carroll's diary is much more discursive than either his brother's or Colahan's. Again, a good deal of his time was spent in attending stations and sick calls, all of which are faithfully recorded. Whereas Thomas' diary is more concerned with his own personal affairs and interests, James is much more expansive and he includes pen pictures of the archbishop and some of his fellow priests. In particular, he

¹ Diary of Richard Colahan, 13 Feb 1889, from Holy Redeemer Church 1792-1992: A Bray Parish, ed. Brendan O Cathaoir.

targets those clerics whom he sees as bombastic and overbearing and he is not sparing in his comments. He also gives detailed descriptions of the diocesan conferences and of some disputes which occurred in the diocese during his time.

While curate in Anacarty, Thomas O'Carroll, who was educated in Paris and was later to be president of St. Patrick's College, Thurles, spent his spare time mainly in reading, writing and walking. Only very occasionally does he mention the books being read. They include books such as Robertson's **History of Scotland**, theological tracts such as Dens' **Treatise de Angelis** or magazines such as *Paley's* and *Tait's Magazine*. Clearly, Thomas O'Carroll was a serious minded individual, as he refers to the magazines as "unprofitable" reading.² It must be stated here that priests were somewhat limited in their choice of reading material because of the statute of the Synod of Thurles which forbade priests to read novels or other works likely to "inflame the passions". They were also obliged to refrain from reading books in which religion was mocked.³

Apart from reading, Thomas O'Carroll was interested in astronomy and heraldry. He was a man who suffered from depressions, certainly during 1846, as several times he describes himself as being dejected, sad and melancholy. In one entry, where he is describing a visit to the Cliffs of Moher, he writes rather pathetically: "This is a delightful day, such as would impart a charm to a desert; magnificent scenery wherever the eye turns; music to cheer the heart; pleasant parties grouped over the fields at their cold dinners and all so gay and happy faces around me. In fact, here at this moment all the elements of enjoyment and yet how is it that I am as one alone in this world. Strange, that when in the midst of pleasure, I should be forever sad. Is it that my heart is incapable of enjoyment. No but I am the victim of some unaccountable susceptibility that ever poisons the cup of pleasure when I am just going to taste it - *replebor doloribus usque ad tenebras...*"⁴

This diary is interesting too in that it was kept during the years of the Great Famine. The failure of the potato crop and the consequent distress do not feature very largely in the diary and merit only passing references. For instance, on 30 May 1846, O'Carroll records that the crops are promising and that there is less apprehension regarding the "anticipated failure" of the potato crop.⁵ The following month, he speaks

² Diary of Thomas O'Carroll, 9 Jan 1846, CDA.

³ *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae*, MDCCCL, De vita et honestate clericorum.

⁴ Diary of Thomas O'Carroll, 27 Aug 1846, CDA.

⁵ *Ibid.* 30 May 1846.

of a rumour of potato blight and he expresses the hope that the rumour is "premature".⁶ In the months following, there are references to meal distribution and sometimes the curate himself assists. He mentions too how he tore down "an inflammatory notice" posted on the chapel gate inviting people to a meeting being called to "devise some means to keep themselves from starvation". O'Carroll was of the opinion that there was not "that great distress which they would represent", although he adds almost immediately that the potato crop was "a total and utter failure" in all the places he had visited.⁷ In fact, about 200 people turned up at the meeting but they were dispersed by the parish priest. "It is well for those folk who take such a delight in calumniating the Catholic priesthood", the diarist remarked, "that we still retain so much influence over the people - it is generally exerted for their protection and I have known several instances where the lives of the oppressive landlords have been saved by our interference".⁸

Card-playing was a pastime which was popular with the clergy, especially when clerical friends came to visit. Thomas O'Carroll records several occasions when visitors called and they played cards until one a.m. and three a.m. - "a sad business" was his verdict.⁹ Once on a visit to Templemore, he played until one a.m. losing £1. 5s.¹⁰ Similarly, on a visit to Cashel, he passed the night playing cards with the Dean and the two curates, John and James Ryan.¹¹ O'Carroll's brother, James, too, talks of an evening spent with priests of Hospital parish, drinking claret and playing loo, at which he lost the sum of 19s. 6d.¹²

Occasionally, the card playing could have more serious consequences and this, no doubt, was the motivation underlying the statute of the Synod of Thurles which issued a warning to clerics about festivities and activities like card playing which might lead to a wild night or *ad intempestam noctem*, as it is delicately worded in the statutes.¹³ In November 1881, a Dublin curate, M. J. Glinicy, was requested to defend himself against the charges of "being addicted to the habits of smoking and card playing". As regards the smoking, Glinicy admitted the offence and he offered what must now seem a most unlikely excuse, namely, that he smoked on medical advice, stating that it had been recommended to him by his doctor "at one stated time in the day

⁶ *Ibid.* 24 June 1846.

⁷ *Ibid.* 13 Sept 1846.

⁸ *Ibid.* 15 Sept 1846.

⁹ *Ibid.* 10, 11, 12 Sept 1846.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 9 Feb 1846.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 20 Nov 1846.

¹² Diary of James O'Carroll, 21 Feb 1862, CDA.

¹³ *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae*, MDCCCL, De vita et honestate clericorum.

after dinner". He liked playing cards as a pastime but he denied that he had ever played beyond ten o'clock, "except very rare occasions and solely as a pastime and to accommodate myself to the exigencies of the occasion". He hoped that these allegations would not affect his chances of promotion in the diocese.¹⁴

More serious was the report sent in December 1861 by Michael Kieran, V.G. of Armagh diocese, to Archbishop Dixon, in which he spoke of a "scandalous scene" that had taken place at a dinner party in the house of a Fr. Maginn. The party was a large one and after dinner, a number of guests began to play cards for high stakes, "six or seven pounds in one game". A curate, also named Kieran, won a large sum of money from a man called McKeown, who was unable to pay. Words passed between them and McKeown became so offensive that Maginn asked him to leave the house. A man called Sheehan spoke in defence of McKeown and he was immediately attacked by Kieran, who shook his fist in Sheehan's face, addressing him "in very opprobrious language". Kieran was supported by another member of the party and both men became so outrageous that Fr. Maginn asked them to leave the house. "All this", the writer comments sadly, "in the presence of Protestants". Kieran was reported to be under the influence of drink. "This scandalous business had been for the last fortnight a subject of conversation among the Catholics and Protestants of this town", the writer concluded and he then asked that the curate Kieran be removed as soon as possible.¹⁵

Two weeks later, Michael Kieran wrote again to say that the curate Kieran would probably get some of the persons who were at the party to write to the archbishop to state that nothing improper had occurred. He had heard that Kieran's father was ill and so he advised the archbishop to leave things as they were for a few weeks.¹⁶

Hunting and Horse Racing

Given that the horse was such an essential part of the life of the diocesan priest, it is hardly surprising that the interest should have carried over to the sports of hunting and horse racing. The ability to handle a horse with a reasonable degree of skill was a necessity for priests who sometimes had to respond with alacrity to the urgent demands of a sick call. Some of the clergy, particularly those from more affluent backgrounds,

¹⁴ M.J. Glincoy to McCabe, St. Paul's, 29 Nov 1881, DDA.

¹⁵ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 17 Dec 1861, ArmDA.

¹⁶ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 29 Dec 1861, ArmDA.

practised horse riding as a hobby. Edward O'Dwyer, bishop of Limerick, was rated a good horseman¹⁷ and Patrick Leahy, archbishop of Cashel, was described as an accomplished horseman.¹⁸ Theo O'Meara, parish priest of Holy Cross, also in Cashel diocese, was "very much given to horse exercise".¹⁹ Horse riding was a popular pastime, too, with the staff of Maynooth College. William Hanton, in his reminiscences, mentions members of staff who were accomplished horsemen and he recalls seeing Dr. Walsh, later archbishop of Dublin, and Dr. Molloy putting a horse through his paces in the college square and "Dr. Molloy, with the eye of an expert, pointing out the incipient ring-bone or spavin".²⁰

Other equine pursuits, were specifically forbidden. Following the hunt was not considered a suitable clerical pastime and according to the statutes of Thurles and other synods, priests were forbidden to take part in fox-hunting or *venatio clamosa*.²¹ This was a statute which a number of clerics chose to ignore and James O'Carroll cites the case of Thomas Meagher, who followed the hunt while stationed at Templebredin and "always endeavoured to make a remarkable jump to show he was no ordinary man". Meagher is said to have considered these statutes "childish", describing them as the "little constitutions". As a result of his hunting exploits, he was reported to the archbishop and changed to Mullinahone.²²

Attendance at horse racing was also forbidden by statute but again, it was a pastime which had its share of clerical adherents. Thomas O'Carroll records in a matter of fact way that his fellow curate, Hogan, attended the races at Cashel on two consecutive days.²³ That was in 1846 and subsequently, measures were introduced to prevent priests from participating in horse racing, either actively or as spectators. A statute specifically forbidding attendance at horse races was passed at the Synod of Thurles in 1850²⁴ but, according to James O'Carroll in 1862, "since then, this injunction has partly gone into disuse". He referred to the races which were held at Newcastle, Co. Limerick, in 1862, at which some Cashel priests were in attendance. They were reported to Archbishop Leahy by Dr. Butler, bishop of Limerick. One curate, Maurice Power from Anacarty, made the excuse of visiting his father and riding on horseback through the grounds where the races were being held. Leahy, who had

¹⁷ Begley, *op.cit.*, pp. 563-4.

¹⁸ Diary of James O'Carroll, 23 Jan 1863, CDA.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 27 Dec 1863.

²⁰ William Hanton, *Maynooth Forty Years Ago*, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, xxi, 1923, p.389.

²¹ *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae*, MDCCCL, De vita et honestate clericorum.

²² Diary of James O'Carroll, 22 April 1862, CDA.

²³ Diary of Thomas O'Carroll, 29,30 Sept 1846, CDA.

²⁴ *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae*, MDCCCL, De vita et honestate clericorum.

to be seen to take action, announced that all faculties were being withdrawn from those who had attended the Newcastle races unless they came to see him or the vicars of the diocese within forty-eight hours. O'Carroll remarks that the priests who had lately emerged from Maynooth treated the statutes of the National Synod and provincial synods with contempt if there was any interference with their amusements. "They look on them as mere trifles", he commented, adding that everyone was pleased with the manner in which Leahy had acted.²⁵

Priests of Armagh diocese in the 1860's were attending race meetings and Kieran reported to Dixon that a curate called Carraher went to the races at Coolerill. Afterwards, he was invited to dinner where he quarrelled with another priest, Tully. The two exchanged blows and Carraher was so badly beaten that he could not return home to his parish for a fortnight.²⁶

In a strange letter to Paul Cullen in 1852, some priests of the diocese of Ardagh wrote to protest about the possibility of selecting Peter Dawson, parish priest of Carrick-on-Shannon, as coadjutor bishop of the diocese. One of the accusations levelled against the P.P. was that he had organised horse racing at Bundoran and that, not only had he attended, but he had run one of his own horses which, according to the complainants, broke loose during the race and killed "a Protestant man having left his own rider almost lifeless".²⁷ Dawson had been voted *dignissimus* by his fellow clerics but, according to one commentator, these complaints influenced Paul Cullen against supporting Dawson at Rome.²⁸ It is more likely that Cullen the bishop-maker had already decided that John Kilduff would be the preferred candidate.

There were always clergymen who were interested in horse racing and to the end of the century, there were occasional complaints made to bishops. In 1899, the parish priest of Roundwood, Co. Wicklow, James Manning, complained to Archbishop Walsh of Dublin about the frequent absences from the parish of his curate, James Cashen. "I suspect very strongly", Manning told the archbishop, "that he is today and will be tomorrow as well in the near neighbourhood of Punchestown races, so that St. Kevin's won't see him back till perhaps Thursday or Friday".²⁹ Such complaints, however, are relatively rare. It must be assumed that this particular pursuit

²⁵ Diary of James O'Carroll, 24 Sept 1862, CDA.

²⁶ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 4 Dec 1865, ArmDA.

²⁷ Some priests of Ardagh to Cullen, Longford, 22 June 1852, DDA.

²⁸ James Kelly, The Catholic Church in the Diocese of Ardagh 1650-1870, Longford: Essays in County History, ed. Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran, (Dublin 1991), p.82.

²⁹ James Manning to Walsh, Roundwood, Co. Wicklow, 11 April 1899, DDA.

was confined to a few and that the statute prohibiting attendance at race meetings was faithfully observed by the majority of priests.

Hare coursing was popular with some priests and James O'Carroll describes his delight at being allowed a day's coursing on Lord Hawarden's preserves near Clonoulty. He records that he had the use of four dogs and he killed seven hares.³⁰ A number of priests kept greyhounds and a newspaper featured a story of a legal action brought by Rev. D. English, a curate at Cappamore in Cashel diocese, against John Hayes, a gamekeeper for Sir Charles Barrington of Glenstal, Murroe. English claimed that the gamekeeper had shot his greyhound on the lands at Cappamore. The curate was awarded £5 damages with costs.³¹

The Armagh curate, Kieran, who was involved in the fracas at Maginn's card party referred to above, attended coursing meetings and fox hunts. He had been warned three times by his parish priest but to no avail.³² Indeed, it would appear that coursing was a popular pastime with the Armagh clergy in the 1850's and 1860's, as a report to Archbishop Dixon in 1861 speaks of a coursing party being held in the parish of Collon at which a "great many priests" were present. The archbishop's informant, Michael Kieran, commented: "Some of my people are very angry that they cannot share in these amusements without being denounced by the authorities".³³

Clerical Lifestyle

In general, the clergy lived well. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the standard of priests' houses improved as bigger, more permanent and more comfortable parochial residences were erected throughout the country. There was a parallel increase in clerical income and the lifestyle enjoyed by priests generally can only be described as secure and comfortable, particularly when contrasted with the lifestyle of many of those amongst whom they lived. Even in 1846, the year of Thomas O'Carroll's diary, there is no evidence that the hardship engendered by the failure of the potato crop extended to the curate's diet or impinged on his standard of living. Apart from entertaining visitors in his own house, O'Carroll dined out with friends, both cleric and lay. From time to time, he dined with the parish priest of

³⁰ Diary of James O'Carroll, 8 April 1863, CDA.

³¹ Clippings from public journals, courtesy Dom. Mark Tierney, O.S.B.

³² M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 30 March 1854, ArmDA.

³³ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 21 Nov 1861, ArmDA.

Clonoulty and when he travelled to other places, he spent the evening with the local clergy or with lay friends.

The bishop's visitation of the parish was an occasion for a gathering of the clergy from the deanery. Thomas O'Carroll describes the dinner on the occasion of one such visitation as "a sumptuous entertainment". There were 23 persons present, including the archbishop, and, O'Carroll notes, "the dessert [was] very *recherche* and claret passed rather freely".³⁴ The celebration for the visitation to the Dean of Cashel was a two-day event. O'Carroll attended on the second day, when the party consisted of 29 clergymen in addition to the archbishop. Once again, champagne and claret were "passed about rather freely".³⁵ The episcopal visitation to O'Carroll's own parish of Clonoulty was a less glamorous affair with 12 guests for dinner.³⁶

The highlight of Thomas O'Carroll's social calendar in that year was surely his invitation to dinner at Bianconi's, the home of the transport king. The dinner which O'Carroll attended was exclusively a clerical party and the first of a series which "that hospitable and good man" hosted for his friends and neighbours. The clergy were "sumptuously entertained" with "a great profusion and variety of the most *recherche* wines - the dessert such as one only meets with in *la belle France* - it is my favourite", says O'Carroll, who had been a student at the Irish College, Paris. There followed a "delightful evening", in the course of which Bianconi entertained his guests with anecdotes of his earlier years and he recounted some of the difficulties he had had to contend with. This dinner was held on the evening of 18 October 1846.³⁷ On the 25th of this same month, there was a meeting held in the national school to organise a committee and to open a subscription list for the relief of the destitute poor. This latter meeting O'Carroll did not attend.³⁸

It may have been social dinners like these which caused the Synod of Thurles to enact a statute cautioning priests about hosting great banquets and feasts which lasted into the night.³⁹ The statute was obviously interpreted rather loosely, to judge from the diary of James O'Carroll. As a curate at Clonoulty, where his brother was P.P., James O'Carroll records events which were very similar to those recorded by his brother 16 years previously - conferences, sick calls, visits, vacations and clerical dinners. In

³⁴ Diary of Thomas O'Carroll, 17 June 1846, CDA.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 1,2 Aug 1846.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 8 Aug 1846.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 18 Oct 1846.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 25 Oct 1846.

³⁹ *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae*, MDCCCL, De vita et honestate clericorum.

February 1862, 26 priests, at the invitation of Dr. Leahy, attended the anniversary office of his predecessor, Dr. Slattery. Afterwards, they had dinner where they discussed the new Sunday law by which the sale of intoxicating drink on Sundays in the diocese of Cashel was designated a reserved sin.⁴⁰ O'Carroll was not an admirer of Leahy, whom he criticised for promoting his favourites to the best parishes in the diocese and the curate claimed that, since Leahy became bishop, champagne was the principal table drink at visitation dinners. "It was given at his consecration", O'Carroll elaborates, "and the priests immediately after followed the good example". According to the diarist, port, sherry and sometimes claret were until then the more popular drinks with the clergy - "these still continue", he adds, "but champagne is the *pars principalis*". The occasion that gave rise to these particular comments was a confirmation in Clonoulty parish. There were 13 priests for dinner and when the archbishop had departed, three priests remained behind, talking, drinking and singing until after midnight. So ended the visitation, which, O'Carroll remarks, "is ever attended with a great deal of anxiety and hard work".⁴¹

In his diary, James O'Carroll also records that, some years previously, when Dr Everard was coadjutor bishop of Cashel, the priests were forbidden to take whiskey, brandy or other strong drinks, "either pure or mixed", before dinner. Light drinks, such as wine and ale were allowed. O'Carroll's explanation for the ban was that Everard, being "a most accomplished gentleman", wished his priests to have gentlemanly manners. In O'Carroll's view, as the priests were of the people, and in those times, lived very much among the people of the parishes where they were located, they should partake of the drink favoured by the people - "This, of course, was the national drink - whiskey". When some priests did not comply with the statute, it was enforced *sub poena suspensionis*. The law was personal rather than local, so that a Cashel priest, when outside the confines of the diocese, could take as much strong drink as he pleased. "The priests of other dioceses still say to this day that the Cashel priests must be very fond of drink", the diarist observes somewhat ruefully.⁴²

The English parliamentarian, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, who toured the country and visited a number of priests and bishops during the years 1886-1889, has some interesting observations in his book, **The Land War in Ireland**. Blunt was unusual among English commentators in that he was a supporter of home rule and an activist who sided with the tenants in the land agitation. Blunt visited Patrick Duggan, bishop

⁴⁰ Diary of James O'Carroll, 5 Feb 1862, CDA.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 23 June 1862.

⁴² *Ibid.* 15 May 1863.

of Clonfert, well known as a supporter of the Land League and a friend of Davitt and other prominent national figures. According to Blunt, Duggan, who described himself as "a peasant's son", lived "in a poor little house - they call it the Palace" where he was waited on by "one old peasant woman and a little foundling boy". The food provided was "of the meagrest".⁴³

Duggan's lifestyle was the exception rather than the rule and was in stark contrast with what Blunt found when he paid a visit to the best known clerical champion of the Land League, Thomas Croke of Cashel. On his arrival, Blunt found Croke with the bishop of Ross and two priests "sitting over their potheen". This, the author hastens to add, was not a carousal but simply an end of evening "glass of grog".⁴⁴ Blunt was then shown around the archbishop's ample house and garden, he attended mass in the private chapel and he admired the cathedral. The opening of the cathedral was the occasion of a great display and Croke is quoted as saying that there were 10,000 people, 24 bishops, 280 priests, 15 dozen gallons of whisky, 20 [dozen gallons] of champagne, 30 [dozen gallons] of sherry and claret and not a drop of any liquor left in the town that night".⁴⁵ Of course, Croke's background and social origins were also in stark contrast with that of Duggan, the peasant's son, as Croke came from a wealthy family.

In general, Blunt was not impressed with the culinary skills of the priests' housekeepers. At Father Coen's of Woodford, Co. Galway, he had a "merry party" with speeches, songs and much drinking of whisky. He was not happy with the quality of the food which was served - a boiled leg of mutton, "half cooked, like the potatoes", at one end of the table and a roast goose at the other. The second course consisted of "another precisely similar roast goose" and another boiled leg of mutton, the positions on the table being reversed. There the meal ended with "whisky potations supplying all further deficiencies".⁴⁶

Some of the priests that Blunt visited in the more remote areas led a spartan existence and did not pay much attention to diet or hygiene. Fr. O'Connor of Firies in Kerry diocese lived in a house which had fallen into disrepair - "a mouldy place with pictures hung askew on the walls.....". When he arrived in, Blunt and the priest sat down to a breakfast which consisted of two eggs, although it was one o'clock in the

⁴³ W.S. Blunt, *op. cit.*, p.66.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.97.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.281.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.341.

day.⁴⁷ At Castleisland, Blunt dined with Archdeacon Irwin and his two curates. "The dinner was less good than the company", he observed, "as the only meat was pig, and so I dined on potatoes".⁴⁸

It was not uncommon to find that the housekeeper was related to the priest, as frequently, relatives resided in the priests' houses. Usually, it was a sister or a niece and, as has been noted elsewhere,⁴⁹ this could be a source of strife in the parochial house and lead to discontent and disagreements between fellow priests who had to share a residence. James MacFadden of Gweedore in Raphoe diocese was attended by his sister and Bernard Walker of Burtonport by a niece.⁵⁰ Blunt noted that MacFadden's sister did not sit with the company at meals, although she was "a well educated woman". "This seems to be a custom with the country priests", he concludes,⁵¹ but it was probably the norm in all clerical houses, rural and urban. Archbishop Croke, too, had a niece who acted as his housekeeper and an examination of clerical wills shows that relatives taking up residence in the parochial house was a quite frequent occurrence. This included nephews who looked after the priests' farms and a study of the wills shows that relatives were well rewarded for services rendered, in contrast with the housekeepers, who, if they benefitted at all from clerical wills, generally received meagre amounts.⁵²

Walter MacDonald describes the fare enjoyed by the staff at Maynooth College during his time there as professor and prefect of the Dunboyne Establishment. When he joined the staff, he says that their "entertainments were simple". For breakfast they were served tea, bread and butter and boiled eggs. Port and sherry were served during dinner when there was a guest at table and on examination days. Later on, the custom was to have dinner in the priests' refectory with "a little plain wine or punch" and then to retire to the entertainments' room, where finer wine was served - "Madeira, claret or champagne on greater occasions" and fruit. Dinner consisted of soup, boiled leg of mutton at the top of the table, ham, fowl and roast mutton at the centre and roast beef at the end. There was a billiard room and smoking was introduced at a later stage.⁵³

The French journalist, Paschal Grousset, writing in 1887, speaks of priests he has met as "all sleek, fat, and prosperous, dressed in good stout broadcloth, as smooth

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.116.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.118.

⁴⁹ cf. Chapter 2, Parish Priests and Curates.

⁵⁰ Hurlbert, *op. cit.*, pp. 92,131.

⁵¹ Blunt, *op. cit.*, p.54.

⁵² cf. Chapter 5, Wealth and Status - The Evidence from the Wills.

⁵³ MacDonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.

as their rubicund faces and provided with gold chains resting on comfortable abdomens".⁵⁴ In Limerick, Grousset was surprised at three parish priests who were staying at a hotel costing fifteen shillings a day. He observes that at dinner they liked to drink claret- "one likes Leoville, another Chateau Margaux, while the third prefers Chambertin; and they drain the cup to the last drop". Then, when the writer entered the dining room late at night to get a cup of tea, he found the three priests "seated round glasses of smoking toddy".⁵⁵

Clerical Vacations

As regards clerical vacations, August was the month most favoured for holiday making and Lisdoonvarna in Co. Clare the most popular clerical holiday resort. Already by mid century, Lisdoonvarna was frequented by diocesan priests on vacation. In his diary of 1846, Thomas O'Carroll gives a detailed account of a holiday which he took in August of that year. He began his vacation on 19 August with a visit to some friends in the area of Cashel. He then went on to Limerick where he spent a night. Then on to Lahinch, where he lodged at Hanrahan's hotel at a cost of £1.4s. a week. He joined a party on a visit to the Cliffs of Moher, which he found disappointing. The remainder of his holiday was spent mainly in visiting surrounding towns like Ennistymon and Milltown Malbay and he met with clerical friends who were holidaying in Lisdoonvarna. On his way home, he dined and stayed the night at Barry's hotel in Limerick before arriving home on 4 September.⁵⁶ James O'Carroll, too, records that he spent a vacation in Clare - nine days in Lahinch and then some time in Ennis, Limerick and Athlunkard.⁵⁷

One of the attractions of Lisdoonvarna as a holiday resort was the reputed curative powers of its spa waters and clerics like John MacEvelly, archbishop of Tuam, who suffered from arthritis, were frequent visitors there.⁵⁸ Lisdoonvarna seems to have been favoured by clerics from all parts of the country, as William Dunphy, parish priest of The Naul in Dublin diocese, writes that he spent his holiday there in August 1892.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Grousset, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* pp219-20.

⁵⁶ Diary of Thomas O'Carroll, 19 Aug - 4 Sept 1846, CDA.

⁵⁷ Diary of James O'Carroll, 17 Aug 1863, CDA.

⁵⁸ Bane, *op. cit.*, p.666.

⁵⁹ William Dunphy P.P. to Walsh, Damastown, The Naul, Co. Dublin, 26 Oct 1892, DDA.

Not all vacations, however, were spent in Ireland and members of the hierarchy particularly would have been familiar with travelling in Europe, if only by reason of their regular *ad limina* visits to Rome. The O'Carroll brothers took holidays abroad. James travelled with his cousin Michael Ryan, C.C. Knocklong, to Scotland in 1859 and in 1860, they visited Paris, where both had studied. From there, they travelled to Strasbourg along the Rhine and they spent three days in Brussels, from where they paid a visit to Waterloo.⁶⁰ The following year, the vacation began with a tour of the Cork/Killarney area, finishing in Galway.⁶¹ Later that same year, James O'Carroll went on a trip to Europe, where he visited Holland, Denmark, Poland, Hungary and Russia.⁶²

England was the country chosen for James O'Carroll's vacation in 1862. In London, he visited the Exhibition and he spent some time walking in the gardens of the palaces. He then left for Oxford, where he spent his time visiting the colleges and libraries. From Oxford, he went to Warwick to see Guy's Castle - "a noble pile of a building" - and he toured the picture gallery there. Next day, he journeyed to Liverpool and from there to Bowness-Windermere, where he spent a few days. He passed a full week at Douglas on the Isle of Man and he travelled around the island by steamer. O'Carroll ended his account of this vacation with this remark, "During the vacation heard more cursing than during all my previous life".⁶³ O'Carroll's brother, Thomas, also visited the London exhibition that year and then went on to Oxford and Warwick before returning home unexpectedly. "Though he travelled more than any priest in Ireland", James remarked of his brother, "he did not find himself in the vein of going any place this year".⁶⁴

It is difficult to assess the popularity of continental holidays among the clergy of the nineteenth century, as, apart from the testimony of the O'Carroll brothers, there is very little material on which to base a judgement. It must be noted, too, that both James and Thomas O'Carroll were educated in Paris and so were already familiar with travel abroad before being ordained priests and, in the matter of vacations, they may not be representative of the home-trained diocesan clergy.

⁶⁰ Diary of James O'Carroll, 3 Jan 1862, CDA.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 16 Jan 1862.

⁶² *Ibid.* 14 Feb 1862.

⁶³ *Ibid.* August 1862.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 29 Aug 1862.

Literary Pursuits

The training which the nineteenth century training of priests received was not designed to encourage intellectual pursuits and exploration. This is not to say that the priests were lacking in intelligence and ability but the climate of the times which was responsible for statutes such as that proscribing the reading of the great works of fiction and attendance at the theatre was hardly likely to encourage aspirations to becoming artists or novelists. Indeed, the system seems to have achieved its end by producing men who were prepared to accept the limitations set for them and to work within the narrow confines of an inherited set of propositions. For those clerics who did profess an interest in matters theological, the volumes they produced proved to be so ponderous and obscure as to be almost unreadable. Such works, of course, as scriptural commentaries were targetted at a particular audience but one wonders if they were read by any, save those for whom it was a prescribed task for seminary studies and deanery conferences.

Priest theologians like George Crolly and Walter MacDonald who did attempt to expand the boundaries of theological thought and who brought to it a fresh and adventurous approach found their works subjected to examination and censure and they were made aware that such innovative thinking was not encouraged. Within these narrow confines, the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, founded in 1864, did make a notable contribution by ensuring that priests were kept informed of new emphases and the journal also provided a forum where priests could air problems of practical and pastoral importance.

In the area of creative fiction, a Maynooth alumnus who became one of the best known popular novelists of his time was Patrick Augustine Sheehan, who entered Maynooth in 1869 and who was ordained in Cork in 1875. He was appointed parish priest of Doneraile in 1895 and the novels of Canon Sheehan became standard reading in Irish households in the last decade of the nineteenth century and well into this century. His first great success, **My New Curate**, was first published in serial form over the years 1898-99 and after that, there followed a number of works which were widely read, including **Glenanaar**, **Luke Delmege**, **The Queen's Fillet** and **The Graves at Kilmorna**.⁶⁵

At the turn of the century, an interesting and dissenting voice is raised. It is that of Gerald O'Donovan, a priest of Clonfert diocese who had been an active supporter of

⁶⁵ J. Anthony Gaughan, *Doneraile*, (Dublin 1969), pp. 33-5.

Plunkett's Co-operative movement. O'Donovan left the priesthood and emigrated to England and his novel, **Father Ralph**, tells the story of an idealistic young man who is trained at Maynooth and serves, as O'Donovan had, in a cathedral town.⁶⁶ The eponymous hero of the novel is a supporter of the co-operative movement and the Gaelic League. His attempts to resolve the social problems of the parish by encouraging the laity to take control of their own affairs are frustrated, his support for the co-operative movement is actively discouraged by the bishop and the businessmen of the town and finally, when the new theological thinking is condemned in the decree *Lamentabili*, Father Ralph decides that he must leave the priesthood, a disillusioned man. The novel is a serious indictment of the nineteenth century Catholic priesthood and the clerical church. For O'Donovan, the church had become a "monstrous organization, self-seeking, material, thinking only of itself...." and an organization in which "love and pity had flown away with knowledge".⁶⁷

One area where the Irish catholic clergy did make a significant contribution was in the promotion and development of local historical and archaeological societies. They served on councils and committees and they subscribed and contributed articles to society journals. These articles were mostly concerned with local church history, tracing the history of abbeys and churches or giving brief biographical sketches of local clerics and saints. In the 1890's, the bishop of Waterford and Lismore, Dr. Sheehan, took a prominent part in promoting such societies and he was president of two societies, the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society and the Society of Waterford and the South-East of Ireland.⁶⁸ The committee of the Ossory Archaeological Society was composed entirely of priests, twelve in all. The inaugural address was given by the bishop, Dr. Moran, in January 1874 and he was also the president. Over a period of 23 years, Moran himself produced no less than 13 different works on Irish ecclesiastical history, the best known of which was *Spicilegium Ossoriense*.⁶⁹ Vice-president of the society was Canon Philip Moore, who was a very prominent figure and known nationally for his interest in the activities of historical societies. In the first volume of the society's journal, there were 26 articles and all but 6 of these were contributed by priests.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Gerald O'Donovan, **Father Ralph**, (London 1913).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p.318

⁶⁸ *Journal of Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 1892, 1899; *Journal of Waterford and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society*, i, 1894-5; v, 1899

⁶⁹ John Healy, *The Historians of Ossory*, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, v, 1884, p.297.

⁷⁰ *Journal of Ossory Archaeological Society*, i, 1874-5; vol. 11 1880-83.

One of the regular contributors to the Ossory journal was Michael Comerford, parish priest of Monasterevan. When later he became bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, he was vice-president of the Co. Kildare Archaeological society, which had the Duke of Leinster as president. The bishop was a regular contributor and he wrote many papers and articles for the society journal.⁷¹ The Limerick clergy, too, took an active part in the affairs of the local historical society which was called the *Limerick Field Club* and the first volume of the journal had contributions from priests on topics such as the Shannon legends and a brief biography of the Gaelic scholar Eugene O'Curry.⁷²

A number of diocesan histories were produced during those years but the authors, for the most part, were uncritical in their approach. They were content merely to present the broad outlines of the evolution of the local churches and they were careful to steer clear of contentious issues. The outstanding work in this field was that of William Carrigan, who produced the **History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory**. Carrigan collected an enormous amount of material for this painstaking and scholarly work but he also was careful to avoid any controversial issues. For instance, in his biographical note on Robert O'Keeffe, the turbulent and defiant Ossory cleric, Carrigan states that he is not prepared to comment on O'Keeffe's disputes with his superiors,⁷³ even though in his preparatory notes, Carrigan gives a brief account of the parish priest's troubled career.⁷⁴ Carrigan's work apart, what remains in the case of diocesan histories consists largely of lists of parish priests and curates and some dubious commentaries on the early history of dioceses and parishes. Perhaps where these priests made their most valuable contribution was in promoting the study of history and archaeology by founding and actively supporting local societies and by facilitating the publication of articles in society journals.

The G.A.A., the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement

Traditionally, the Catholic clergy have always been closely associated with the Gaelic Athletic Association. Yet, strange to say, there was no clergyman present at the

⁷¹ *Co. Kildare Archaeological Society Journal*, i, 1891-95; iii, 1899-1902.

⁷² *Journal of the Limerick Field Club*, i, 1897-1900.

⁷³ Carrigan, *op. cit.*, p.359.

⁷⁴ Carrigan mss., NL.

inaugural meeting of the Association in Hayes Hotel, Thurles on 1st November 1884.⁷⁵ Archbishop Croke had accepted the position of patron and very quickly, priests became involved in every aspect of the Association. Because the G.A.A. was supported by the National League, in which the clergy were actively involved, and also because they were wary of IRB influence, the Catholic clergy became most enthusiastic mentors and promoters of the Association and the games.⁷⁶ However, following the stormy convention of 1889, when it was felt that members of the IRB had gained effective control of the organisation, there was a dramatic change and priests withdrew in large numbers.⁷⁷

The next few years were crucial for the G.A.A. The fact that it survived the onslaught from the Catholic church authorities, as well as the internal dissensions following the Parnell crisis, was remarkable and probably due to the innate appeal of the games themselves. The clerical attack was initiated by Cardinal Logue in January 1889 and his lead was followed by other bishops of the Northern province. Bishop Nulty of Meath, who had been a staunch supporter of the Land League, was particularly hostile, as were the priests of his diocese. But Croke of Cashel kept faith with the beleaguered Association and he continued to lend his support and encouragement. It was helpful, too, that Walsh of Dublin held fire and in many areas, individual priests continued to promote the games actively. By 1890, almost half of the 30 G.A.A. clubs in Tipperary were under clerical control and all but 4 of the 33 Wexford clubs had priests in charge. In Co. Laois, 3 priests were serving on the county board but, significantly, of the 97 clubs in Cork, only 25 had any clerical involvement.⁷⁸

The decision of the G.A.A. to back Parnell in the crisis of 1891 almost brought the Association to an end during the years 1892-93. Even Archbishop Croke, the most courageous and independent member of the Irish hierarchy, was forced to distance himself from the Association during those years. However, after a time, he did renew his support and in 1894, he made a very public gesture by attending the All Ireland finals of that year. Despite this, clerical opposition and resentment persisted and throughout the 1890's, there was very little clerical involvement in G.A.A. affairs.⁷⁹ There were, of course, individual exceptions, with the Tipperary clergy in particular

⁷⁵ W.F. Mandle, *The Gaelic Athletic Association and Irish Nationalist Politics 1884-1924*, (Dublin 1987), p.7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.28; Marcus de Burca, *The GAA: A History*, (Dublin 1980), p.51.

⁷⁷ de Burca, *op. cit.*, p.51.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 51-2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 62,71, 84.

following the lead of their archbishop. It was not really until the the second decade of this century that the Catholic clergy renewed their involvement and gave to the G.A.A. at all levels the enthusiastic support that became such a prominent feature of the Association.

From the beginning, the Catholic clergy took an active interest in the Irish language revival movement, which took root in the 1880's. In 1883, the long-titled Gaelic Union for the Preservation and Cultivation of the Irish Language had as its patron Dr. Croke of Cashel - of course- and two of the four vice-presidents were William Fitzgerald, bishop of Ross and William J. Walsh, then president of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Of the 62 council members, 9 were prominent Catholic ecclesiastics, including Ulick Bourke of Tuam, who wrote a biography of John MacHale in Irish, William Quirke of Cashel and James O'Laverty of Down and Connor.⁸⁰ The lists of subscribers over the following months show the names of 116 secular clergy, including those of Maynooth students.⁸¹

As the movement flourished and as interest in the revival of the language quickened, there was a corresponding increase in the numbers of priests becoming actively involved. A leading role was taken by Eugene O'Growney, who was ordained for Meath diocese in 1888 and who later became professor of Celtic Language and Literature at Maynooth College. O'Growney immersed himself in all aspects of the Irish language and culture and from his student days he was a regular visitor to the Gaeltacht areas. His **Easy Lessons in Irish** had a very wide circulation and became a basic text book for students in the Gaelic League classes. He also compiled an Irish dictionary.⁸²

The first edition of *An Claidheamh Soluis* in March 1899 has an editorial by Peadar Ua Laoghaire,⁸³ the author of such popular works as **Mo Sgeal Fein** and **Seadhna** and who worked tirelessly for the language revival during his life. The chairman of the executive committee of the Gaelic League during those crucial early years was Dr. Michael O'Hickey,⁸⁴ later to become a controversial professor of Celtic Studies at Maynooth. Those early volumes of *An Claidheamh Soluis* give unmistakable witness to a vibrant popular burgeoning movement, enthusiastically supported by individual members of the Irish Catholic hierarchy and the secular priesthood. Public meetings were being held throughout the country and branches of

⁸⁰ *The Gaelic Journal*, i, Aug 1883, pp. 333-4.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* pp. 335, 365-8, 398-9 *et al.*

⁸² Healy, *op. cit.*, p. 619.

⁸³ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, leabhar 1, uimhir 1, 18 Marta 1899.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 18 Marta 1899.

the League were being established from Belfast to Cork. In many cases, the lead was taken by the local parish priest or curate. O'Growney's and Ua Laoghaire's basic text books were being studied and in many centres, the classes were being given by Catholic priests. Two bishops, Clancy of Elphin and Owens of Clogher, joined the council of the Gaelic League and over the months March to September 1899, 26 new branches were established with priests acting as presidents or chairmen. In fact, the only discordant note struck was at the Dungarvan branch, where it was noted that "the priests and representative men of the district are standing aloof".⁸⁵ It should be noted too that among the early subscribers to the League were clergymen of other denominations and members of the Royal Irish Constabulary.

As the movement gathered momentum in the opening years of the new century, clerical involvement was still evident. Priests continued to act as chairmen and presidents of local branches. In some cases, the clerical presence was a titular one but many of them played an active role in founding branches and in delivering papers and lectures. Over those crucial early years, at least 20 secular priests were important figures in the revival movement. Apart from those already mentioned, priests like Sean O Raghallaigh of Tuam, Matt Ryan ('The General') of Land League fame, Gearoid O Nuallain of Down and Connor and Matthew Maguire of Clogher displayed a real commitment to the cause of the language.⁸⁶ The Catholic priests, too, in their capacity as managers of national schools were key figures in the fight to have the Irish language included in the school curriculum.

A study of the lists of those attending Ardfheiseanna of the Gaelic League gives clear testimony to the numbers of Catholic secular priests involved and to the important role that they played. For some, undoubtedly, it was a case of boarding a bandwagon that had already gained considerable momentum but many others were leaders and facilitators, both at local and at national level. *An Claidheamh Soluis* of 7 March 1903 quotes Douglas Hyde, in a lecture at Ardee, as saying that it was the rise of O'Connell and the establishment of Maynooth that signalled "the death of the Gael in his own country". But the paper notes with satisfaction the stated resolve of the chairman, Canon Rogers, to do his part "in a more practical way" for the future and it also declares that the enthusiasm of the Maynooth students at that time could not be surpassed.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 18 Marta 1899.

⁸⁶ Diarmuid Breathnach agus Maire Ni Mhurchu, *Beathaitheis a hAon - a Tri*, (Baile Atha Cliath 1986, 1990, 1992).

⁸⁷ *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 7Marta 1903.

If the Gaelic League did not succeed in its ultimate objective of restoring the Irish language to its former position as the principal spoken language of the majority of the people, it can be said that its intervention at this time was instrumental in saving the language for posterity. Richard de Hindeberg, another clerical enthusiast, may have been overstating the case when he referred to Maynooth college in 1903 as "the pivot centre of Gaeldom"⁸⁸ but it can be said that a significant number of Catholic clergymen of the time had played a notable part in the attempt to restore the Gaelic language and culture.

The position of the secular clergy in relation to the Irish co-operative movement was much more ambivalent. In order for the co-operative movement to succeed and flourish, the enthusiastic and active backing of the Catholic priests, such hugely influential figures at local level, was an essential requirement. It would seem, too, that the kind of local initiative which the co-operative movement represented would win the unqualified support of a clergy in line with current Catholic social thinking which encouraged the development of smaller scale industry and sought to arrest the drift of rural populations to the cities and towns.

Despite the testimony of Horace Plunkett, the movement's leading light and guiding spirit, that there were 331 societies which had local priests as chairmen,⁸⁹ the earlier response of the Catholic secular clergy to the co-operative movement was not at all as enthusiastic as might have been expected. The reasons for this have to do with the effect of the movement on local communities and the threat that it posed to certain vested interests, as Liam Kennedy has pointed out in an interesting and convincing article on the topic.⁹⁰ There was opposition to the movement from local traders and large farmers, and graziers in particular, had little to gain from co-operative organisation. It was a situation, therefore, which presented the clergy with a dilemma and which many of them resolved either by withholding support or giving the movement their qualified backing. This latter position is well exemplified by Dean White of Nenagh, who took the chair of a meeting called to discuss co-operation but who made it clear that his presence there was not to be taken as necessarily signifying support for co-operative enterprise. The Dean signalled the difficulty confronting local priests when he declared that he had first to be satisfied that "the traders and shopkeepers have nothing to dread from the spread of this agricultural co-operative movement...."⁹¹ In a

⁸⁸ Breathnach agus Ni Mhurchu, *Beathaithneis a hAon*, (Baile Atha Cliath 1986), 1. 81.

⁸⁹ Horace Plunkett, *Ireland in the New Century*, (London 1904), p.119.

⁹⁰ Liam Kennedy, *The early response of the Irish catholic clergy to the co-operative movement*, *Irish Historical Studies*, xxi, 1978, pp. 55-74.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* pp. 63-4.

word, the priests were not rushing to support a movement which was seen as a threat by those sections of their congregations whose financial contribution to the Catholic church and clergy was substantial. Where the co-operative was seen to be a divisive force, the clergy were cautious, harking back to the standard approach adopted earlier in relation to the Land League and Home Rule movements, where many of the bishops and priests offered a qualified support, not from personal conviction but from a fear of alienating parishioners. Unlike the Gaelic League, the co-operative movement, in its non-political and non-denominational aspects, was not borne along on the surge of the high tide nationalist feeling, to which the Catholic population -and hence the clergy- gave universal and unequivocal support.

Chapter Seven

Problems of Discipline - Alcohol.

Not only did the synod of Thurles, held in 1850, coincide exactly with the mid century, but it also coincided with the arrival in Ireland from Rome of Paul Cullen and the beginning of the episcopacy of a man who was to prove such a highly influential figure in the organisation and evolution of the modern Irish Catholic church. The synod of Thurles was important in at least two ways - firstly, it consolidated the efforts of reforming bishops in individual dioceses in the pre-Famine church and secondly, it provided a touchstone, a point of reference, for church rulers in their dealings with their priests and in their subsequent deliberations at diocesan, provincial and national level. Decisions were made at Thurles in relation to the powers and duties of bishops and of parish priests and guidelines were established. A strict code of behaviour was drawn up and it was accompanied by appropriate penalties for breaches of discipline. Normally such breaches were to be dealt with by judicial process but in practice, most cases were dealt with by the bishops rather than by ecclesiastical tribunals. Bishops were given wide powers and very often they dealt with problems of discipline administratively by recourse to the use of the sanction imposed *ex informata conscientia*. This often led to justifiable complaints of lack of due process from clergymen who had been accused and sentenced without being offered the opportunity of presenting a defence. Recourse to the sanction proved to be a rather ineffective method of dealing with what was to prove the most widespread and most intractable of disciplinary problems among the nineteenth century Catholic clergy, the abuse of alcohol.

Alcohol Problems

"Cases of intemperance come, like railway accidents, rarely and at long intervals. It is the only scandal or at least the only source of scandal that we have to fear in the clergy", wrote David Moriarty, bishop of Kerry, in an allocution to his clergy.¹ The cases dealt with by Moriarty may have been rare and infrequent but it would appear that, in other dioceses, the clergy were somewhat more accident prone.

¹quoted in Kieran O'Shea, David Moriarty (1814-77), *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society* 1971, p.122.

Of all the discipline problems with which Catholic bishops were faced in the second half of the nineteenth century, none generated a greater volume of correspondence than that of priests who indulged excessively in alcohol. This does not necessarily mean that alcohol abuse was the greatest or most prevalent problem among the clergy, as one individual's alcohol problem could account for numerous letters being written over a number of years. The reason for the spate of letters had to do, first of all, with the nature of the problem, which was very public and, therefore, demanding of urgent attention. Secondly, it was a recurring problem for almost all of the priests involved and there was no satisfactory solution, except for total abstinence. Very often, what happened was that the problem was transferred from one parish to another and its arrival in a new parish inevitably brought another round of complaining letters from fellow priests and lay people.

This is not to underestimate the seriousness of the problem because there is no doubt but that excessive drinking was a significant problem and it was one which occupied a considerable amount of episcopal time and attention. Nor indeed, was it a problem which was new to the Irish Catholic priesthood. In April 1671, Oliver Plunkett, archbishop of Armagh, reported to Rome that, while on visitation in six dioceses in the province, he had noted that the vice which was most prevalent was "excessive drinking of beer and especially whiskey". And, "what is more", he adds, "this takes place in taverns so that many other scandals result.. ". The archbishop was giving a great deal of attention "to trying to eradicate this cursed vice, which is mother and nurse to all sorts of scandals and disputes".²

In a decree of the Synod of Thurles dealing with the lifestyle of the clergy, priests were bound, under pain of suspension, to observe a state of sobriety and total abstinence from all forms of alcoholic drink was urged as a counsel of perfection.³ This general rule was reiterated and reinforced in the statutes of the various regional synods. For instance, the acts of the Provincial Synod of Munster in 1877 included, again under pain of suspension, a specific instruction forbidding the use of whiskey, brandy, rum "or any other ardent spirit *before dinner*".⁴ The law was clearly and easily stated. Its implementation was altogether another matter, particularly in situations where addiction to alcohol was viewed not as an illness but as a vice or as a human failing which could be rectified by renewed attention to prayer and the sacraments.

²Plunkett to Baldeschi, Carlingford, 16 April 1671, from **The Letters of Saint Oliver Plunkett 1625-1681**, ed. John Hanly, (Dublin 1979), p. 180.

³*Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae apud Thurles*, MDCCCL.

⁴*Acts of the Provincial Synod of Bishops of Munster*, 1877, Croke Papers, CDA.

Generally, the cases of priests drinking to excess follow a similar pattern in the various dioceses. First of all, there were the complaints from other priests, from lay people or from both. Then, depending on the response of the accused party, the bishop issued his instructions. In the rare event of a priest admitting to having taken excessive drink, the bishop would recommend the immediate retreat of the priest for a period to places of retreat such as the Cistercian Abbey at Mount Melleray, the Jesuit house at Milltown Park in Dublin, or the institutions run by the Brothers of St. John of God at Stillorgan in Dublin and at Bruges and Ghent in Belgium. Here the priests made a retreat and they were encouraged to abstain and to take the total abstinence pledge.

As more frequently happened and where the charges were persistently denied by the offending priests, bishops found it necessary to take steps such as issuing stern warnings, withdrawing faculties and imposing penalties until such a time as the priests agreed to attend one of the recommended retreats. When the probationary period was over, priests were usually transferred to another parish but, where there were repeated transgressions, it became more difficult for the bishop to find suitable appointments for those priests. When it became evident that a particular priest could no longer serve in a parish and remain sober, then he was appointed to a chaplaincy in a convent or institution. It is interesting, too, to observe the efforts of Irish bishops to 'export' the problem and it seems that the bishops were sometimes quite willing to give testimonials to priests who had applied for work in a foreign diocese, although the same priests were considered unfit for a mission in their native dioceses.

"Drink, drink, that is the source of all affliction", was the observation of Francis Devlin, parish priest of Donaghmore in Armagh diocese, when writing to complain about his curate, Michael McElhone, in July 1865.⁵ McElhone had already had a suspension imposed on him by the time he arrived in Donaghmore. The first occasion was in 1861 and McElhone was said by the vicar general, Felix Slane, to be impatient at not being allowed to celebrate mass. McElhone's father, too, was "painfully importunate", according to Slane, who considered that this was not indicative of perfect resignation but rather the reverse.⁶ Then, four years later, following an incident which Slane described as "more or less notorious", McElhone admitted to having drink taken and he was again visited with a suspension.⁷

⁵ F. Devlin to Slane, Donaghmore, 1 July 1865, ArmDA.

⁶ Felix Slane to Dixon, Dungannon, 26 June 1861, ArmDA.

⁷ Felix Slane to Dixon, Donaghmore, 3 July 1865; Slane to McElhone, Dungannon, 3 July 1865 (copy), ArmDA.

The archbishop of Armagh who had to deal with this case, Joseph Dixon, had succeeded Paul Cullen in 1852 and he found himself confronted with a range of disciplinary problems among what appears to have been a fairly unruly band of priests. The reports which the archbishop received regularly from two senior priests of the diocese, Felix Slane of Dungannon and Michael Kieran of Dundalk, present a picture of parish priests and curates who had more than a passing interest in gambling, horse racing, farming and women. But the greatest difficulty facing the archbishop was how to deal effectively with the excessive drinking which was a major problem for a significant number of his priests. And to judge from the correspondence, it does seem that Dixon never did deal very effectively with the problem. Cases involving drunken priests dragged on and usually their drinking was already well known to fellow priests and parishioners before it reached the archbishop's desk.

A case in point is that of John Marmion, parish priest of Kilcurley near Dundalk. In March 1854, it was reported that Marmion was unable to say mass and was suffering from a bad attack of *delirium tremens*. Michael Kieran, who made the report, said that Marmion's drinking was "no secret to many persons in Dundalk and the neighbourhood".⁸ The following month, Kieran wrote again to say that Marmion was drinking to excess and that he had been in this state for the past eight days.⁹ Kieran recommended that something be done "in an authoritative, summary way" without any discussion with Marmion.¹⁰ It is doubtful if this happened, as two years later, the archbishop was informed that Marmion was unable to say mass and he was confined to bed as a result of intemperance. The parish was said to be in a very bad way and Kieran advised the archbishop to inflict a punishment "that will bring with it more humiliation than the last".¹¹ Dixon acted on the advice but Michael Kieran was unwilling to serve the suspension on Marmion as he felt that it would lead to an unpleasant scene with the priest, who was aware that Kieran was the archbishop's informant. Kieran also reported that Marmion had recently been drunk at the table of a respectable family and was guilty of an act "which I will not disgust you by telling". He was of the opinion that Marmion should be forced to resign the administration of the parish, suggesting that the parish priest be offered £50 for service in the poorhouse, on which, combined with the income from his farm, he could live comfortably in retirement.¹²

⁸ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 30 March 1854, ArmDA.

⁹ Note in Kieran's hand, dated 2 April 1854, ArmDA.

¹⁰ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 4 April 1854, ArmDA.

¹¹ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 26 Dec 1856, ArmDA.

¹² M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 28 Dec 1856, ArmDA.

The suspension was removed in February 1857¹³. Marmion's drink problem, however, was not to be resolved by the imposition of penalties. In 1861, Kieran was writing again to Dixon to voice his suspicions that Marmion was still drinking to excess and he advised the archbishop to wait until there was definite proof before taking action.¹⁴ In 1863, there was another report to say that Marmion was indulging once more and that it was likely to be very serious in a short time.¹⁵ The priest was again placed under suspension, although he protested vigorously that he was now temperate. Kieran was of the opinion that, although suspension *ipso facto* was a "terribly stringent measure", it should be kept in place as it had proved "so effectual" in other cases. He recommended that the suspension be retained for another year although he felt that Marmion would not observe it. "I think this is a case in which mercy has reached its limits and that if he fall again, he should be relieved from the care of souls", the vicar general concluded.¹⁶

James Daly, parish priest of Coalisland, was another who had a very severe drink problem. The usefulness of Daly taking the pledge was questioned by Felix Slane, the dean and parish priest of Dungannon, who felt that there was no adequate means of establishing whether Daly kept the pledge or not. "Nowadays", the dean remarked, "there is very little importance attached to the obligation it imposes; and it might be made a cover for secret indulgence". He recommended strict vigilance and he thought that if Daly could only be kept from "rambling abroad", then matters would be much improved.¹⁷

Daly's curate, Patrick Slane, reported that he did not see the parish priest take much drink in public following the dean's visit but he feared that Daly did not remain sober in private. "All I would require of him", said the curate, "would be to say mass on Sunday and keep sober". He was not very optimistic that Daly would change his ways, as he felt the P.P. was in the habit of drinking for years and that he would find it very difficult to stop. He added that Daly had lost the confidence of the people "through his own fault" and that anything Daly might say would have no effect with them. Finally, the curate promised to keep the archbishop informed of any "misconduct or grievous fault". The letter ended: "On the whole, I think he is

¹³ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 20 Feb 1857, ArmDA.

¹⁴ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 22 March 1861, ArmDA.

¹⁵ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 29 Aug 1863, ArmDA.

¹⁶ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 16 Nov 1864, ArmDA.

¹⁷ F. Slane to Dixon, Dungannon, 17 Feb 1860, ArmDA.

improving a little and I hope will continue to improve and much required indeed especially in this Protestant country".¹⁸

Then in June 1861, Dixon was forced to take action. The occasion was the holding of a mission in the parish. Daly was drunk when the missionaries arrived in the parish, he was drunk every day during the mission and, according to Kieran, in other respects, he was guilty of the most scandalous and outrageous conduct. Kieran felt that the "wretched man should not be allowed to hold for an hour longer the charge of souls".¹⁹ Felix Slane, reporting the incident to Dixon, referred to Daly as a "very extraordinary man", whose conduct had been a source of scandal for many years past. He related how Daly, in a fit of drunkenness, had a disagreement with the mission fathers on a Sunday night. The fathers were ordered to leave Daly's house and they had to find a car to take them to Dungannon in the early hours of the morning. Slane thought it as well that the people were not "afoot or they would have torn himself and his house to pieces".²⁰

The offending P.P. was duly suspended and the curate Slane wrote to Dixon to compliment him on having done his duty. "All you have to regret is that you did not do it long ago..." he commented sanctimoniously and he assured the archbishop that he could supply him with further proof of Daly's drinking. He then proceeded to provide the information, stating that, since the missionaries had left the parish, the parish priest had never appeared in the chapel - "You might ask me where was he, in answer in bed indulging in the bottle". Slane had hopes of Daly improving during the mission but in fact, he said, the P.P. had become "more dissipated and more reckless". The opinionated curate did not hold out much hope for Daly and he added, very ironically when one considers the tone of his own letters, that the P.P. was also lacking in humility.²¹

Another priest, a Fr. Caraher, a curate at Camlough was drinking so heavily that Kieran thought it would be the cause of his death. At one time, he had shut himself up in his room for a month and drank so much that he was incapable of performing any of his duties. One night he climbed out the window of the house and he could not be found by the P.P. and servant. He was finally discovered walking in the fields "in a state of nervous excitement" and he ran away from the other curate who tried to take him home. He was told by the doctor that his life would be a very short one unless he

¹⁸ P. Slane to Dixon, Stewartstown, 18 May 1860, ArmDA.

¹⁹ M. Kieran to Slane, Dundalk, 24 Jan 1861, ArmDA.

²⁰ F. Slane to Dixon, Dungannon, 26 June 1861, ArmDA.

²¹ P. Slane to Dixon, Stewartstown, 29 June 1861, ArmDA.

stopped drinking. The P.P. related how Caraher, going to dine at a house on his way home from the races, quarrelled with a Fr. Tally. The two priests even exchanged blows and Caraher was so badly hurt that he was unable to return to his own house that night.²² Kieran urged the archbishop to remove Caraher immediately, suggesting that his uncle might allow him to stay with him for a time. Kieran was sure that no P.P. would take Caraher as a curate as the facts which he had related were well known to many of the clergy.²³

Three months later, Kieran wrote to inform the archbishop of Caraher's death, which, he said, was generally believed to have been caused by intemperance. He reported further that the other curates were also drinking too much. One of them, McNulty, had been repeatedly drunk within the previous three months and he had been missing from his house for two or three days at a time without giving an account of his whereabouts. On one occasion, a priest had to be found late at night to supply for the missing curate. "This is an awful state of things and requires an immediate remedy", Kieran appealed to the archbishop.²⁴

A parish priest, H. J. Cavanagh of Collon, was involved in a drinking spree with Lord Massarene in April 1861. The Lord was carried to his room in a helpless state, Kieran reported, while Cavanagh was brought home "in a state that did not edify those who saw him on the occasion". The hapless priest was involved in an accident on his way to the Lord's and, according to Kieran, the affair was the subject of "very ugly talk" not only in Collon but in the surrounding parishes. Cavanagh drank too much - "so much that he cannot sometimes stand on his legs" - and Kieran thought it "a terrible thing to have so many souls depending on such a man". In the same letter, Kieran remarked that too much weight should not be attached to memorials in favour of priests and he cited the case of a Fr. Hanratty who was "visibly under the influence of drink" on the very day that Dixon received a memorial in his favour signed by a large number of priests.²⁵

These and other cases in Armagh demonstrate very clearly the particular dilemma which superiors had to resolve. For the bishop, it was a case of to act or not to act. If he did decide to act, then it was a question of which line of action to pursue and the timing of his intervention was also of crucial importance. The offending priest had, first of all, to be confronted and, as generally happened, if there was denial, the

²² M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 4 Dec 1865, ArmDA.

²³ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 6 Dec 1865, ArmDA.

²⁴ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 12 March 1866, ArmDA.

²⁵ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 12 April 1861, ArmDA.

bishop had to make the decision whether to suspend the priest despite the protestations of innocence. It was easy, in the first instance, to issue a warning and to offer counsels of perfection, but if the situation did not improve, then the bishop had to contemplate imposing strictures of a much more serious nature. Some bishops were slow to act, probably because of the very serious consequences for priests who were removed from the mission and who had suspensions served on them. If the bishop was unsure and hesitant, as Joseph Dixon of Armagh certainly seems to have been, then he ran the risk of having to deal with the consequences of unseemly public conduct of the kind described above.

It was usual for priests who were accused of overindulgence in alcohol to deny such charges, particularly in the first instance. Either there were outright denials or other excuses were offered, such as the effects of taking medicine or the use of alcohol to treat flu or some illness. There were some, like Moses Fitzpatrick of Beragh parish in Armagh diocese, who continued stubbornly to deny the charge and to demand a fair hearing. In October 1853, Fitzpatrick was ordered to resign the mission in Beragh, as Felix Slane considered this to be absolutely necessary. Slane's difficulty with this solution was that the replacement he was considering, a priest called O'Hanlon, was also given to the drink and Slane declared that if O'Hanlon did not keep "strictly sober it would [ruin] religion in that parish altogether"²⁶.

Fitzpatrick was removed to Ballymacnab but he continued to protest his innocence. He felt sure that he knew the identity of the archbishop's informants and he asserted that they had made the charges against him "from interested and sinister views and not through a zeal for religion". The indignant Fitzpatrick made the point that, in any civil tribunal, the accused party was not condemned without an investigation and a proper hearing and he felt that the ecclesiastic tribunal should at least be as perfect in its proceedings as the civil tribunal. "In your mode of judgement", he chided the archbishop, "the best man may be ruined on the barest assertion of the greatest ruffian in the parish". He then called on Dixon to let the charge be fairly tried - "let my answers be brought forward *facie ad faciem* and if the charge be juridically proved I willingly submit to any grade of degradation Your Grace may think proper to name". When, he asked, had there been a single case of dereliction of duty? As regards "the unfortunate state of the parish", Fitzpatrick asserted that it was unfortunate only for the clergy who, from their attention to its spiritual wants, received as their temporal reward "either death or premature old age or ingratitude.....". He had been accused, too, of giving general dissatisfaction to the parish and his response was to invite the

²⁶ F. Slane to Dixon, 8 Oct 1853, ArmDA.

archbishop to come to any of the congregations on any Sunday to put this question to them and if the archbishop were to find a single individual who was against him, Fitzpatrick would accept the consequences.²⁷

This lack of due process or any court of appeal was also highlighted by John MacShane of Crossmaglen parish, who adopted a similar approach as that of Fitzpatrick when issued with a warning by Dixon. He answered that he had never given scandal by his drinking, that he had been most attentive to his duties and most prompt in attending calls since he came to Crossmaglen. Again, like Fitzpatrick, he voiced his suspicion that there were parties who were opposed to him but he did promise to take the pledge for five years and then, perhaps, for life. "By this means", he said, "I shall edify the faithful and correct what has been imperfect in the past" and he stated his resolution that, as long as he remained in the parish, he would make it a point to give good example.²⁸

Michael Kieran succeeded Joseph Dixon as archbishop of Armagh. He thus found himself now having to deal directly with the problems about which formerly he was adviser and counsellor to Dixon. And it would appear that Kieran was not any more decisive than his predecessor, if one is to judge from the case of Dr. Campbell, a curate in Armagh town. In this case, Kieran sought the advice of a former archbishop of Armagh, Paul Cullen. Campbell was found in a state of intoxication in one of the streets in Armagh at about ten o'clock at night and two of his fellow curates, who had gone to attend to him, found it very difficult to bring him home. Campbell had been a student of Propaganda in Rome, where he was known to Cullen and it was for this reason that Kieran felt it best to consult Cullen. The advice from Dublin was that Campbell be placed under the care of a prudent P.P. and that he be degraded as little as possible. Kieran was anxious to comply with Cullen's wishes, especially as he said that Campbell's conduct hitherto had been most edifying.²⁹

"Though I am generally the last person in the diocese to hear of anything injuriously affecting the character of any of our clergy, still it is a matter of astonishment to me that I have not heard sooner of Dr. Campbell's conduct", wrote Kieran, who, because of his poor health, spent much of his time in places like Vichy. He was reluctant to believe the reports about Campbell's behaviour, saying that there was nothing in the priest's appearance or demeanour to warrant the suspicion against

²⁷ M. Fitzpatrick to Dixon, Ballymacnab, 22 Dec 1856, ArmDA.

²⁸ John McShane to Dixon, Crossmaglen, 4 April 1866, ArmDA.

²⁹ Note in Kieran's hand, Forthill, 25 April 1868, ArmDA.

him. The superiors of the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Armagh, where Campbell was chaplain, had always spoken of him "in the highest terms", Kieran observed.³⁰ All of which sounds like a superior reluctant to hear the bad news and perhaps postponing any unpleasant decision that might have to be taken.

As stated already, the nature of the problem and the necessity for immediate action generated a good deal of correspondence. Much, too, depended on the attitude adopted by the accused and, in the case of those adopting a stubborn attitude and refusing to acknowledge the problem, there could be protracted letter writing. Another factor which added considerably to the file of letters was that the problem was a recurring one in most cases, so that very often the round of letters from complainants to superiors, from superiors to accused parties and responses from those accused, was ongoing and repetitive.

This is well illustrated in the case of Joseph Barron, a Dublin curate, whose difficulties with alcohol brought a spate of letters to diocesan authorities over the years 1879-82. From the first letter dated 1 March 1879, it is clear that Barron's problem had already been identified, as this letter from a foreign monastery certified that Barron had taken the pledge for twelve months.³¹ From then on, this case follows the usual pattern of denials, threats of suspension, readmission to the ministry and recourse to treatment.

In August 1879, James Doyle of Athy reported to Archbishop McCabe that Barron had been under the influence of drink while saying mass and a parishioner had described it as "a burlesque on a religious celebration and just as if he intended to turn the whole thing into ridicule". Doyle requested that his identity be kept secret as the mention of his name would interfere with the friendly relations he enjoyed with Barron's many friends in Athy.³² The reply to the charge was predictable, with Barron claiming that the charge came from "evil envious tongues". Like Fitzpatrick of Armagh, he wished to meet "face to face" the persons who had made the charge, as he could not see why "the groundless accusation of a cowardly enemy should have so much weight".³³

Further accusations followed and Barron, writing this time from St. Kevin's, Harrington St., declared himself shocked and "subjectively innocent of any scandal".

³⁰ Copy of letter in Kieran's hand, Forthill, 30 Aug 1868, ArmDA.

³¹ Note, Isidore of St. M. M., [signature illegible], 1 March 1879, DDA.

³² James Doyle to McCabe, Athy, 25 Aug 1879, DDA.

³³ Joseph Barron to McCabe, Skerries, 25 Aug 1879, DDA.

He denied that his sermons were overlong and as for the statement about "heat and perspiration", he responded by saying that he could not fly in the face of Providence and demand good looks. The archbishop had mentioned that he was troubled about Barron's presence in the diocese and the curate asked where he should go. If McCabe were to find him a position in England, he declared his willingness to go there. He ended by stating that it was unfair that the private arrangements of the "vicariate cabinet" should be the common property of the other priests.³⁴

Barron was unusually stubborn and determined to fight his corner, as is demonstrated by a note from him, in which he threatened to take a civil action against the archbishop for libel and defamation.³⁵ If it was an idle threat on the priest's part, McCabe decided that he could not ignore it and he agreed to hold an investigation, which would cover the whole period from the time that faculties had been restored to Barron on condition that he would abstain from all intoxicating drink.³⁶ Barron then demanded to know who the archbishop's informants were. "Your Grace will have to admit that I have a right to know and summon them", he declared, "and still more so because I have been punished and defamed before I was tried". One of the charges made against Barron was that he was in the habit of using whiskey at mass instead of wine. This charge, said Barron, was made by the wife of a professional man, who was in the confidence of some of the clergy of the town of Athy and it was simply jealousy between the regular and secular clergy, he maintained, which had resulted in the laity knowing too much.³⁷

The beleaguered curate continued in his attempts to establish the identity of his accusers and, despite the archbishop's denials, Barron remained convinced that the sisters of the Dominican convent in Athy were among them. Referring to charges made about his conduct at Skerries, Barron commented: "As to Skerries, I only wish for a plebiscite". He hoped for a peaceful ending to "this most disgraceful correspondence".³⁸ To which McCabe replied that he was putting the whole matter in the hands of Canon Keogh, the vicar forane of the district, and he, too, was hopeful that this might bring the correspondence to a peaceful end.³⁹

³⁴ Joseph Barron to McCabe, St. Kevin's, 16 Oct 1879, DDA.

³⁵ Joseph Barron to McCabe, Skerries, 18 Oct 1879, DDA.

³⁶ Edward McCabe to Barron, Kingstown, 20 Oct 1879, (copy), DDA.

³⁷ Joseph Barron to McCabe, 28 Oct 1879, DDA.

³⁸ Joseph Barron to McCabe, Skerries, 2 Nov 1879, DDA.

³⁹ Edward McCabe to Barron, Kingstown, 3 Nov 1879, (copy), DDA.

One year later, the complaints were flooding in again, this time from Finglas, where Barron was now ministering. He was accused of "haranguing the populace from the steps calling for a cheer for Parnell etc.". Later, he was described as being in a state of *delirium tremens* and, while the writer was present in the house, he had heard Barron speaking from the window upstairs.⁴⁰ Again, Barron pleaded innocence. Writing from Kildare, where he had gone to live temporarily in the family home, he described the charges as "utterly untrue" and he asked for favourable consideration under the most trying circumstances. "I have no means of living and could not remain at home - so that there would be nothing left for me but the workhouse", he pleaded, requesting an appointment that would save him from a "miserable, purposeless life".⁴¹

The despairing curate, now without income or a place to reside, wrote another pleading letter to McCabe. He made his excuses for not attending a retreat in Milltown and he apologised for constantly annoying the archbishop. He was using the Imperial Hotel as his address but in reality he had no fixed abode, since he had had no means of support for some months.⁴² McCabe responded to this heartfelt plea by offering Barron a last chance on the express condition of his taking and keeping the total abstinence pledge.⁴³ The offer was gratefully accepted by Barron and the pledge was taken once more.⁴⁴

Barron's problem was more severe than the taking of a pledge could resolve and in September 1880, he was writing from Athol's Hotel and Restaurant in Sackville St. He had no money to pay his bill - "I don't know what will become of me or what the Proprietor will do with me", he wrote pathetically. He was close to despair and abandoned by family and friends. This sad letter gave details of his melancholy state of mind and his fears for the future. He finished with an appeal to the archbishop to assist him as he was at the time "a real object of charity".⁴⁵

It would appear that Barron's father and sisters relented, as the following month, he wrote from his home place in Kildare to request permission to say mass, even on a Sunday. He was very conscious of residing in a place where he was so well known. He had not felt so well for years and he knew that McCabe would have doubts

⁴⁰ J. Flanagan to McCabe, St. Margaret's, 10 April 1880, DDA.

⁴¹ Joseph Barron to McCabe, Kildare, 22 April 1880, DDA.

⁴² Joseph Barron to McCabe, Kings Bridge, 20 May 1880, DDA.

⁴³ Edward McCabe to Barron, 21 May 1880, (copy), DDA.

⁴⁴ Joseph Barron to McCabe, The Imperial Hotel, 21 May 1880; Note signed James Dalton S.J., Upper Gardiner St., 22 May 1880, DDA.

⁴⁵ Joseph Barron to McCabe, Athol's Hotel and Restaurant, 1 Upper Sackville St., Dublin, 8 Sept 1880, DDA.

about his keeping the pledge. "Yet", he concluded philosophically, "there must be a beginning to everything".⁴⁶

As happened with so many others in a similar situation, Barron then set about finding a mission abroad. He was unsuccessful in his attempts to find a place in England and he requested the archbishop to help him, as he felt that he could not remain at home any longer.⁴⁷ He wrote a similar note to Canon Kennedy but, by year's end, he had not moved from Kildare. Still, he declared, he would die rather than entertain for a moment "the idea of being in any other way than ministering as a priest".⁴⁸

Evidently, McCabe responded positively to this continuous pleading, as Barron wrote in January 1881 to thank the archbishop profusely for his "very great kindness and thoughtfulness".⁴⁹ Yet, there was to be no permanent recovery and a letter headed *The Monastery* has Barron once more offering excuses for his failure to attend to duties. He had been offered a chaplaincy and he speaks of his unhappiness with "a pimping suspicious community" and he complains of being constantly watched. All charges against him are again denied, as he states that not "one in a thousand priests" would live with such a community. He accepts that an investigation would be fruitless, as he feels the archbishop has already made up his mind. "Whoever Your Grace sends to replace me must be either a saint or a hypocrite", he commented, "otherwise he will find it hard to get on here - for really I never before knew what monks were".⁵⁰

The correspondence concerning the case of Joseph Barron ended very much as it began, with a letter from the unfortunate priest. At home in Kildare, he stated that he was hoping to leave for America shortly and that his father and sisters would do what they could to assist him. He appealed to the archbishop for money, promising to repay all. It was to be his last appeal - "and it bitterly pains me to make it" - but whether he received assistance or not, he was determined to travel. His parting shot to McCabe, now a cardinal, was "I shall be truly grieved, Your Eminence, if I shall have to bring away the recollection of Your Eminence's refusal of this my last request".⁵¹

Joseph Barron's tale is worth the telling in that it highlights very clearly the issues and difficulties involved both for those priests who had a drink problem and for

⁴⁶ Joseph Barron to McCabe, Kildare, 14 Oct 1880, DDA.

⁴⁷ Joseph Barron to McCabe, Kildare, 11 Nov 1880, DDA.

⁴⁸ Joseph Barron to McCabe, Kildare, Xmas Eve, 1880, DDA.

⁴⁹ Joseph Barron to McCabe, Kildare, 13 Jan 1881, DDA.

⁵⁰ Joseph Barron to McCabe, *The Monastery*, Sat. morning, [1881], DDA.

⁵¹ Joseph Barron to McCabe, Kildare, 3 Aug 1882, DDA.

those in authority who had to deal with the consequences. The problem was a most public one, and a most intractable one. Because it was also deeply personal, it could not be resolved, in the way of other difficulties, by simply removing the priest from one parish to another. To transfer the person was to transfer the problem and, after a time, it became more difficult to find a place for those priests whose drinking habits were known throughout the diocese. There was only a limited range of options available to superiors and when these were exhausted, the individual was left to his own devices. Many of them, like Joseph Barron, were pathetic figures who continued to drink to excess but continued, at the same time, to entertain the hope of returning to the ministry. Barron's references to being without income and his difficulties in finding living accommodation are echoed in other cases, particularly those of Dublin priests, Thomas O'Neill and John O'Hanlon. These two cases illustrate the human tragedy of men who could not deal with their problem and who were left to their own devices.

O'Neill was a curate at Skerries when his difficulties began. In October 1884, following an interview with Edward Cardinal McCabe, he took the pledge and he pleaded with the archbishop not to move him to another parish.⁵² Two weeks later, James Walsh, P.P. St. Michan's, was writing to reassure a sceptical McCabe about O'Neill's sobriety, stating that O'Neill had not taken a drink for over two weeks.⁵³

The next correspondence from Thomas O'Neill is dated January 1890. Now resident in Rathmines, this and subsequent letters show a man, weak and vulnerable, and entirely unsuccessful in his efforts either to resolve his problems or to find a mission abroad. He appeals to Archbishop Walsh: "My life is comparatively young yet, at least my energies are, and I appeal to the generosity and goodness of heart of Your Grace to save me from the sad fate of having them irretrievably wasted before their time". Declaring that he has been sober for some time, he continues: "No one, but God alone knows, what I have suffered, and how great my punishment has been for the past few years". He then asks Walsh to give him "some little happiness and peace", as he pleads for "any opportunity for the exercise of my priestly functions, no matter how humble or lowly".⁵⁴

The response from Walsh cannot have been very encouraging, as O'Neill was obliged to make further attempts to seek a mission abroad. O'Neill informed the

⁵² T. O'Neill to McCabe, Skerries, 12 Oct 1884; James K. Walsh to McCabe, Skerries, 12 Oct 1884, DDA.

⁵³ J. Walsh to McCabe, St. Michan's, 21 Oct 1884, DDA.

⁵⁴ Thomas O'Neill to Walsh, 100 Upper Rathmines, 30 Jan 1890, DDA.

archbishop of his many previous unsuccessful efforts, "assisted in many cases by some kind priests... ". "The fact of making the application from the archdiocese of Dublin seemed to be against me", he remarked enigmatically, but he was sure that a letter from Walsh would be a great help and encouragement for him.⁵⁵ Finally, Walsh responded to these repeated pleas by allowing O'Neill to say mass in a private chapel at the Catholic University School in Leeson St. This permission was conditional on O'Neill obtaining a monthly sanction from the archbishop. The superior at C.U.S., M.J. Watters, was careful to point out that he would not take any responsibility in the case "more than to testify to the frequency of his celebrating during each month".⁵⁶

It does not appear that O'Neill was fully restored, as in 1892, he was appealing again to Walsh to reconsider his situation and "brighten a life so long darkened by giving me the smallest appointment in your diocese". For the past few years, he wrote, his life had been one of "simple resignation" and he was again appealing to Walsh, "making no claim and having no expectation but from your own kind consideration".⁵⁷

In the case of John O'Hanlon, when one considers that the correspondence spans the years 1866 to 1893, it is obvious that most of his priestly life was spent pleading with successive archbishops to give him a mission in Dublin diocese. As a young priest, he appealed to Paul Cullen, saying that he did not care for himself but he was concerned for his uncle, who was now in his old age - "what a pang of sorrow he will have for the rest of his short life". He promised that the archbishop would never have another complaint against him.⁵⁸

In another letter, O'Hanlon paints a grim picture of a man in the depths of despair, as he writes: "I try to conceal my existence, I am forsaken by all, no friend to guide or help me, no pitying power to raise my spirits from the awful depression under which my feverish existence is passing away, without one ray of hope to brighten it". He tells how his friends have refused to help him further and how he has parted with everything, even his watch. He ends the letter by asking for financial assistance and permission to celebrate mass.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Thomas O'Neill to Walsh, 100 Upper Rathmines, 10 Feb 1890, DDA.

⁵⁶ M. J. Watters S.M. to Walsh, Catholic University School, 89 Lr. Leeson St., Dublin, 30 Dec 1890, DDA.

⁵⁷ Thomas O'Neill to Walsh, 100 Upper Rathmines, 13 Nov 1892, DDA.

⁵⁸ J. O'Hanlon to Cullen, St. Paul's, Arran Quay, [1866], DDA.

⁵⁹ J. O'Hanlon to Cullen, 21 Albert Place, Friday, [no year given], DDA.

"You have no idea of spiritual and temporal difficulties", O'Hanlon wrote to Cullen in 1874, and he talked of spending the best part of his life "not only uselessly but in terrible difficulties of soul and body". He had spent a week on retreat in a convent at Harold's Cross and he had been informed that, through the mediation of Cullen, he could secure a place in one of their French convents for a time.⁶⁰

Four years later, O'Hanlon, who had made his way to London, was writing, this time to Archbishop Edward McCabe, to say that he was "in a maze of difficulties". He spoke again of the trials which he had endured, believing that they were permitted as a just punishment for his sins. His soul, he said, was yearning for peace and he described himself as "an object of pain to some, of horror to others, of scandal to all but especially to those who are glad to reflect on the errors of the individual". Once more, he requested the authorities to rescue him and to restore him, so that he would be "an object of imitation instead of being an object of aversion and scandal".⁶¹

The following year, O'Hanlon renewed his efforts to obtain a mission in the diocese. He called on McCabe to show mercy - "pity I want not but I want the charity of God to be shown to me".⁶² He also found an ally in a Dr. Johnson of Westminster diocese, who wrote on his behalf to McCabe. Johnson had met with O'Hanlon and he thought that O'Hanlon's only fault had been excessive use of intoxicating drink, "a fault, however, that is very grave in a priest". Johnson also confirmed that O'Hanlon was in a state of destitution and he concluded his letter by stating that he pleaded as one "who, knowing what an evil drink is to many priests, has - in great measure for their sake - given up for ever its use".⁶³ Johnson's appeal evidently fell on deaf ears, because at year's end, O'Hanlon was again requesting McCabe to find a place for him. He had been refused admission to Mount St. Bernard's and Mount Melleray and he had also failed to gain admission to places of retreat in Belgium and France. "What is to become of me, God only knows", he ended pessimistically.⁶⁴

There is a gap of thirteen years before O'Hanlon's letters appear again and when he writes to Archbishop Walsh in 1892, he has returned to Dublin and his situation has not improved. The tone of the letters is just as pathetic, as he speaks of the low state of his health and shortage of funds. He accuses Walsh of indifference to his plight, as he writes: "I never go out, brooding alone over my friendless, helpless

⁶⁰ J. O'Hanlon to Cullen, 21 Albert Place, 27 May 1874, DDA.

⁶¹ J. O'Hanlon to McCabe, London, 12 Dec 1878, DDA.

⁶² J. O'Hanlon to McCabe, 42 Augustus St., Regent's Park, N.W. London, [1879], DDA.

⁶³ N. A. Johnson to McCabe, Archbishop's House, Westminster, 26 March 1879, DDA.

⁶⁴ J. O'Hanlon to McCabe, London, 12 Nov 1879, DDA.

state from morning to night". He was also seeking permission to celebrate mass on Christmas Day in some convent, begging of Walsh not to cast him out "on the troubled waters of his unfriendly world" at this time of his life and in his present state of health.⁶⁵

Finally, one year later, there is a letter in which O'Hanlon accuses Walsh of having forgotten him altogether. He has had an acute attack of rheumatism and is compelled by the critical state of his temporal affairs to implore Walsh to make a final decision in his case. He promises to call the following week to find out whether Walsh will offer him some security or whether he must continue to struggle "against adverse circumstances aggravated by the thought I am in the advanced period of the evening of life".⁶⁶

The fact that O'Hanlon's pleading letters span the period 1866 to 1893, involving three archbishops and other ecclesiastical authorities, illustrates again the intractable and ongoing nature of this particular problem. This is clear, too, from the case of Patrick Kinsella, whose drink problems were compounded by his tendency to acquire debts and leave them unpaid. In 1873, Kinsella was obliged to remain off the mission for eight months and most of that time, he spent at his mother's place in Carlow. It had been a time of retreat for him, he claimed, stating that he had not "the taste of whiskey, wine or any other kind of spirituous drink" for several months. He promised that, if restored, he would not drink again and he would preach publicly against it.⁶⁷

The stated resolve did not last and, within twelve months, Kinsella was writing from Delgany to defend himself against charges that he was drinking again. He admitted to taking drink but his excuse was that he was troubled with a painful toothache and that he had been told by his dentist that, when the pain became unbearable, he should fill his mouth with whiskey or brandy, and when it reached his mouth, he should spit it out. He said that he did this for two or three days but one Saturday night, the pain was so acute that he deliberately swallowed two glasses or more. Still, he said, "this did not rise into my head and could not possibly affect me on Sunday". He was in agony during the mass and his swollen cheek had made the nuns or some other people think that he "looked unusually". He was not on good terms with the Carmelite nuns in the parish and he asked the archbishop not to believe the reports.

⁶⁵ J. O'Hanlon to Walsh, 27 London Bridge Road, Sandymount, 21 Dec 1892, DDA.

⁶⁶ J. O'Hanlon to Walsh, 27 London Bridge Road, Sandymount, 21 April 1893, DDA.

⁶⁷ Patrick Kinsella to Cullen, 46 Heytesbury St., 8 Nov 1873, DDA.

He was to move from Delgany within the next two days and he felt that his removal would convince the people that he had done wrong.⁶⁸ Kinsella was forced to return to his family and he found refuge with a brother who lived in Lower Gloucester Road. There was a convent nearby and he felt that the sisters would have no objection to his saying mass there, if the archbishop would allow it.⁶⁹

Two years later, and Kinsella was back on retreat in Mount Melleray. He was praised by the Abbot who found his conduct "excellent in every way". "Drink and getting into debt are the only serious charges which can be brought against him", the Abbot commented rather superfluously and he recommended that Kinsella be given permission to celebrate mass again.⁷⁰

The next complaint came from Greenock in Scotland, from a Fr. M. Condon, who told Edward McCabe of a visit to the Franciscan convent, where he found a clergyman "stupified with drink". It was Patrick Kinsella and, when he was more sober, Condon had him conveyed to the Belfast boat and paid his passage, as Kinsella had only six and a half pence.⁷¹ Kinsella arrived home and a month later, he wrote to McCabe, declaring his resolve "to amend". He was going to Carlow and he concluded: "When I shall have given substantial proof of a conversion, I will ask Your Grace.... to give me a new start here or elsewhere".⁷²

The last correspondence relating to the case of Patrick Kinsella comes from the U.S.A., where Kinsella had gone in the hope of finding a bishop, who would grant him a mission, even on trial. A priest called Simon Hendrick wrote a letter of commendation to McCabe, stating that Kinsella was giving the "most consoling proofs of a sincere repentance and amendment". Kinsella had not as yet exercised any priestly function but, according to Hendrick, he was most determined to remain sober and he was anxious that McCabe should grant him a full pardon.⁷³

The letter which followed shortly on this showed that the change of location had not resolved either Kinsella's drink problem or his financial difficulties. Writing from Altona Pa., the troubled priest begged McCabe's pardon. He admitted to contracting

⁶⁸ P. Kinsella to Cullen, Delgany, 17 July 1874, DDA.

⁶⁹ P. Kinsella to Cullen, 108 Lr. Gloucester Rd., 7 Aug 1874, DDA.

⁷⁰ Barthw. Fitzpatrick, Abbot, to Cullen, Mount Melleray, Cappoquinn, Co. Waterford, 12 Aug 1876, DDA.

⁷¹ M. Condon R.C.C. to McCabe, Wood Cottage, Greenock, 30 Sept 1879, DDA.

⁷² P. Kinsella to McCabe, 153 James St., Dublin, 25 Oct 1879, DDA.

⁷³ Simon Hendrick C.N. to McCabe, St. Michael's Monastery, West Hoboken, N. J., 8 July 1884, DDA.

debts, which he was unable to meet. "Troubles such as these superinduced a greater evil - drink sometimes - and then my fall came", he continued. The troubled priest appealed to the Cardinal to write him a letter of introduction, as he could not persuade any bishop to take him without such a letter. He reiterated his determination to begin a new life, intent only on paying his debts and repairing whatever scandal he might have given. And once more, there was the promise - "Your Eminence need not be afraid of drink - one drop of any kind of liquor distilled, fermented or brewed shall, with God's blessing, never more enter my mouth. The little I took - and it was little - was the cause of changing me out of a saint, I may say, into a sinner". He then referred McCabe to former superiors, such as Dr. Woodlock of the Catholic University and Monsignor Kirby, rector of the Irish College, Rome, who, he said, would be "astounded to hear I had slipped off the rails".⁷⁴

This last letter from Patrick Kinsella was written in July 1884. In its sentiments, it differs remarkably little from letters written by Kinsella thirteen years previously. The picture is that of a man still trying to cope with these problems of excessive drinking and incurring debts, still determined to overcome these problems and still entertaining the hope of finding a bishop who will offer him a place on the mission, either at home or abroad.

The case of Patrick Kinsella was compounded by his propensity to leave debts unpaid and it was understandable that serious alcohol problems were sometimes accompanied by the failure to meet debts, causing further embarrassment for bishops. A publican, Mrs. Byrne, was owed £30 by Kinsella. Richard Galvin, though, had little sympathy with the publican, alleging that she had contributed to Kinsella's alcohol problem.⁷⁵ Referring to two of his curates, Kinsella and Curran, Galvin wrote: "This clever lady helped to ruin Father K and Father C_n ... and a servant man of mine in like manner".⁷⁶

In the diocese of Ardagh, Thomas Cahill, P.P. Ballinagar, Dromahair, complained, in June 1882, that he was being harassed by his curate's creditors.⁷⁷ The curate in question, Michael Nangle, had a most severe alcohol problem and he left a trail of debts about the diocese. He moved from Ballinamuck leaving his rent unpaid and his landlord, John White, complained to the bishop that he had written to Nangle several times but he had received no reply. "I hope my Lord that you see after it",

⁷⁴ Patrick Kinsella to McCabe, Altona Pa., 10 July 1884, DDA.

⁷⁵ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Avonpark, Rathdrum, 1 Sept 1874, DDA.

⁷⁶ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Avonpark, Rathdrum, 9 Oct 1874, DDA.

⁷⁷ Thomas Cahill to Woodlock, Ballinagar, Dromahair, 22 June 1882, Ard DA.

White ended, "as I am long enough waiting this three years for my hard earnings".⁷⁸ When he went to Aghavas, Nangle's debts followed him and the bishop wrote to him about money owing to Miss Conroy, a shopkeeper. Nangle's explanation was that he had fallen into debt because of £40 which he had given to his sister on her marriage. Even to Nangle himself, this explanation must have appeared pretty lame and he promised the bishop to send a cheque at once, "as I am this day settling my accounts".⁷⁹

One firm which suffered as a result of the drinking habits of the Ardagh clergy was Robertson & Ferguson, merchants of Sligo. In 1883, their chief clerk, Thomas J. Leyden, wrote an apologetic letter to Bishop Woodlock, naming three defaulters - Philip Duffy, James Lee and, again, Michael Nangle. All three had a history of drinking and debts. Leyden told the bishop that he had been trying for three years to collect the money owed. "As a Roman Catholic", he stated, "I would feel the shame of bringing them into court and on the other hand, in justice to my employers, I feel I must do so unless my Lord you would interest yourself in the matter".⁸⁰

James Lee, mentioned in the above letter, owed money to other Sligo firms, as is clear from a letter of 1879 to Woodlock from John Johnston, a pharmacist of that town. Lee had apparently informed the bishop that the debt had been paid but Johnston enclosed a letter he had received from Lee, in which the curate expressed his regret that he could not clear his debt for some time but saying that he hoped to do so before Christmas. Johnston had no doubt but that Lee had made a mistake and he hoped to receive the money "without further trouble".⁸¹ After Lee's death, Bishop Woodlock wrote to Leyden of Robertson & Ferguson, stating that, since Lee had no assets, Woodlock himself would be prepared to make a settlement from some money he had in hand.⁸² This offer is characteristic of Woodlock, who appears from his letters to have been a most conscientious and upright individual. Leyden replied that the account had, in fact, been settled in full some time before.⁸³ Lee, however, had left other debts outstanding and as a neighbouring priest, Fr. Gilligan, pointed out to the bishop, all of these creditors were "whiskey people to whom I would not even be the medium of conveying any money". In Gilligan's opinion, the whiskey people were all bound to make restitution themselves and "how they will make it for the damnation of so many

⁷⁸ John White to Woodlock, Killenumera, 16 Dec 1884, Ard DA.

⁷⁹ M. Nangle to Woodlock, Aghavas, 11 Jan 1887, Ard DA.

⁸⁰ Thomas J. Leyden to Woodlock, Sligo, 29 May 1883, Ard DA.

⁸¹ John Johnston to Woodlock, Ballincar, Sligo, 8 Nov 1879; Jas. H. Lee to Johnston, Boherquill, Street, Co. Westmeath, 2 Dec 1878, Ard DA.

⁸² Barth. Woodlock to Leyden, 29 June 1885, (copy), Ard DA.

⁸³ Thomas J. Leyden to Woodlock, Sligo, 6 April 1885, Ard DA.

souls I know not". Two debts, though, he said were particularly urgent - one was to a servant girl who was owed £20 from "her hard honest earnings" and another a woman who had fed and nursed Lee for the last weeks of his life.⁸⁴

For bishops dealing with priests with drink problems, it was simpler when the priest in question was a curate. At least, the curate could be moved at will or compelled to resign. It was more complex in the case of a parish priest, particularly when the P.P. insisted on denying the charges brought against him or resisted attempts by the bishop to force him to resign or move. This happened in the case of John Donovan, parish priest of Celbridge in the late 1880's. A curate in the parish, John O'Donnell, reported in 1888 that the P.P. was very ill. The doctor had called and had given his opinion that Donovan was "a confirmed drunkard". "The interests of religion imperatively demand some great change in the government of Celbridge parish", the curate declared righteously.⁸⁵

Shortly afterwards, the accused P.P. wrote to Walsh to offer his defence. He had taken very little drink, he insisted, and the reason that he appeared so excited was that he was anxious about the confirmations and so had taken some wine. He had not eaten a breakfast and "not being used to stimulants before dinner", he was overcome. This had never happened before, he assured the archbishop, and it would not happen again.⁸⁶

By April of the following year, Donovan was still in charge and writing to Walsh about the possibility of accommodating a second curate in the parish. He appeared to be in full control as he made arrangements for the housing and payment of a curate.⁸⁷ By November, the situation had changed drastically and Donovan was ordered to tender his resignation. The curate O'Donnell reported that Donovan had written out his resignation⁸⁸ and it was duly sent and received by the archbishop⁸⁹

The matter did not end so conveniently, however. Frederick Donovan, a brother of John, was P.P. in Dunlavin and, on receipt of an urgent telegram, he visited his brother in Celbridge. He reported that John had been ready to move to a house in Rathgar but, for some reason, he had changed his mind. The housekeeper was paid off

⁸⁴ N. Gilligan to Woodlock, Cashel, Lanesborough, 2 Feb 1885, Ard DA.

⁸⁵ John O'Donnell C.C. to Walsh, Celbridge, 11 May 1888, DDA.

⁸⁶ John Donovan to Walsh, Celbridge, 16 June 1888, DDA.

⁸⁷ John Donovan to Walsh, Celbridge, 28 April 1889, DDA.

⁸⁸ John O'Donnell C.C. to Walsh, Celbridge, Co. Kildare, 12 Oct 1889, DDA.

⁸⁹ John Donovan P.P. to Walsh, Celbridge, 12 Oct 1889, DDA.

and dismissed but Frederick was of the opinion that she had kept his brother under the influence of drink "to carry out her own views regarding his property". Donovan's replacement, Henry Murphy, was very anxious that the resignee should leave at once but it would appear that many of the people liked John Donovan and wished him to remain. It was Frederick's opinion that his brother should move but he felt it would be judicious to allow him to remain for a while. His brother was well cared for and looked strong and healthy. Also, he was receiving only a very limited amount of alcoholic drink and his mind was much clearer. Consequently, Frederick argued that John should be allowed to remain for a limited time because, if he went away and were left to himself, he would "fall back into his old vicious habit of drinking". Frederick had not been in touch with his brother for a number of years but he believed that it would be a mistake "of a disastrous kind" to require him to leave just then.⁹⁰

The incoming P.P., Henry Murphy, was not too enthusiastic about the proposal that Donovan should remain on for a few weeks more. "I fear it will be just as hard to move him then as it has been before", he said. In Murphy's opinion, Donovan was certainly improving but he was not too sure that the people that Donovan was staying with could be trusted.⁹¹ Ten days later, Murphy was even more anxious. Donovan's brother, Frederick, had been to Celbridge again and was making arrangements for the sale of the furniture by auction. They had moved the furniture to the curate's house and Murphy feared that once the furniture was installed, some of the old P.P.'s friends might move in and "it would be harder to get him to leave".⁹²

"I saw Fr. Murphy who said little about the situation", Frederick Donovan stated in his report of the visit to Walsh. He had found his brother much stronger and clearer in mind but, when he spoke to him of Walsh's wish that he should go to a religious house, his brother said he would soon die if he went to such a place. There was talk of a petition to the archbishop to allow John Donovan to remain and this had been confirmed by "three respectable men". "My brother is very passive - like a child - and appears incapable of making any exertion" was Frederick's verdict and he spoke of the difficulty of finding a suitable place to hold the auction of furniture.⁹³

When John Donovan was still residing in lodgings in Celbridge at the end of the year, Murphy wrote to Walsh to express his concern. "I was always afraid he would settle down as any change becomes a great matter to him", Murphy observed.

⁹⁰ Frederick Donovan to Walsh, Dunlavin, Sat. night, [1889], DDA.

⁹¹ Henry J. Murphy to Walsh, Celbridge, 12 Nov 1889, DDA.

⁹² Henry J. Murphy to Walsh, Celbridge, 22 Nov 1889, DDA.

⁹³ Frederick Donovan to Walsh, Dunlavin, 23 Nov 1889, DDA.

Donovan was now saying that he was waiting only for a letter from the auctioneer and that, when this arrived, he would leave. "This was *proprio motu*", said Murphy, who felt that the information thus volunteered was better than answers given to a direct question or suggestion. The anxious Murphy was of the opinion that Donovan would leave quietly of his own accord but he could not say when - "it is so difficult to get him to make up his mind".⁹⁴

The departure, when it did come, was so hurried and sudden that Frederick Donovan was clearly upset. In his letter to Walsh, he remarked: "We read now and then of evictions where the doctors do not sanction the patients' removal at the Sherriff's desire and I think his case pretty similar. I do not know the very special reasons for his leaving so very hurriedly - I have not been told them". The last time he had seen his brother, he was assured that he was in safe hands and that he would recover his strength. He intended to visit him soon and would then be in a position to form an opinion about him. He was still making arrangements for the auction and, while he had in mind a religious house where his brother might stay, he did not know how this might be received.⁹⁵

There the matter seems to have ended and, in this case, the archbishop's task was made easier by the fact that the dissenting parish priest had a brother in the diocese. Matters could have been considerably more awkward if Frederick Donovan had not intervened and John Donovan had been prepared to be advised by other parties.

Some bishops were more intolerant and less patient in their dealings with alcoholic priests and they laid down very stringent conditions which they insisted on being adhered to. In this category, one must include Laurence Gillooly, a stern disciplinarian, who was determined to stamp out abuses in Elphin diocese on his succession to the more flexible George Browne. For instance, in a letter to the Abbot of Mount Melleray in 1894, Gillooly stated his resolve never to restore faculties to a particular priest. The Abbot had put a strong case for the priest and only because of his special pleading, Gillooly agreed to give the priest another chance. The bishop had laid down the conditions which he required of his priests who were known to be excessive drinkers. Firstly, they were obliged to give a written promise of total abstinence; secondly, they were obliged to go to confession weekly or at least fortnightly; thirdly, they were not allowed to keep drink in their houses; fourthly, they were forbidden to

⁹⁴ Henry J. Murphy to Walsh, Celbridge, 29 Dec 1889, DDA.

⁹⁵ Frederick Donovan to Walsh, Dunlavin, Sunday, [1890], DDA.

take any part in political organisations and movements.⁹⁶ This last condition is interesting and was simply a reinforcement of the attitude of Gillooly, who, following the line advocated by Paul Cullen, would certainly have disapproved of involvement in politics by priests, whether drunk or sober. Finally, Gillooly urged the Abbot to impress these points on the offending priest whom he described as "naturally good and generous but a madman when he drinks".⁹⁷

Similarly, Gillooly, in a note to a Fr. Neary, adopts the same stern tone. "Your appearance is becoming suspicious and disedifying to such an extent that I must make a continuation of your faculties dependent on your total abstinence from intoxicants", he told Neary, demanding from the priest a written pledge by which Neary would be bound until expressly released from it by Gillooly or his successor. The pledge was a solemn promise "to abstain totally from all kinds of intoxicating drinks in public and private and to exclude all such from your house, even though such drink were at various times prescribed by M. D's in the interests of your health". Any violation of the pledge would be punished immediately by suspension.⁹⁸ The reference by Gillooly to drinks prescribed by medical doctors is obviously intended to preclude the excuse most frequently favoured by priests who drank to excess.

The efforts of many bishops to promote temperance among their priests were not as successful as might have been hoped and there is no doubt but that overindulgence in alcohol remained one of the most serious causes for concern right to the end of the century. An examination of the material in the Ardagh archives confirms this. It is quite clear from the correspondence of Bartholomew Woodlock, bishop from 1879 to 1895, that it was a major problem but even from the slim volume of letters that survives from his predecessors, excessive drinking features prominently. Bartholomew Fitzpatrick, the abbot, whose task it was to keep bishops informed of the progress of priests at Mount Melleray, wrote to the then bishop, John Kilduff, in 1853 to report on two priests, Frs. Reynolds and O'Reilly. Reynolds, the abbot said, was considering his options, namely, whether to go on a foreign mission to a diocese of his own choosing, to be allowed to remain in Ardagh until the spring, or to be sent by Kilduff to the house of any P.P. in the diocese. In the latter situation, he would be supported and, although discharging the duties of a curate, he would receive no parochial revenue whatever. Reynolds felt there were parishes in the diocese where he

⁹⁶ Note in Gillooly's hand, 18 Aug 1894, EDA.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Note in Gillooly's hand, EDA.

was completely unknown and where his presence could not give scandal. In any case, he was leaving the monastery, as he felt his health was endangered there.⁹⁹

O'Reilly's case was not so straightforward and the abbot admitted that he did not understand him. "He is either a much calumniated injured man or a barefaced liar" was the abbot's assessment. O'Reilly claimed that he had been given permission to say mass in his own room by a previous bishop, William Higgins, and that he was "never a scandalous drunkard". He was willing to remain at the Abbey for a year but he would prefer if the bishop would allow him to return sooner. "I am bound to say", the abbot concluded, "that all his declarations and wishes were drawn forth by my questions and that if I had not spoken to him he would have remained silent".¹⁰⁰

With the coming of May, Fitzpatrick was not any more sanguine about O'Reilly's prospects. Reporting favourably, first of all, on a Fr. Smith, he went on to say that it would be extremely difficult to find any community "in the whole world" willing to keep O'Reilly. The abbot felt that the Castle of San Angelo in Rome was the proper place for him. He told the bishop that his patience was all but exhausted - "this very morning I found the guest house quite overpowering from the odour of his tobacco which he smokes inside the house. If he were in the Vatican, he would be the same". Worse than that, O'Reilly had left the Abbey grounds and "degraded himself by entering a cabin for the purpose of smoking". The abbot was now supplying him with tobacco "to guard against scandal amongst the poor of the vicinity". O'Reilly was unwilling to remain at the Abbey and he wished, instead, to go to his brother, where he hoped to be supported by the bishop, to whom he promised he would give "no annoyance".¹⁰¹

In a postscript to this letter, the abbot was much stronger in his views, stating that he despaired of O'Reilly being kept in any community on the Continent and that he really considered him "a disgrace to Ireland and just the kind of person that one should wish to conceal from public view". If O'Reilly were to remain at the Abbey, Fitzpatrick would require £50 per annum because O'Reilly's presence there might prevent gentlemen from making retreats as before.¹⁰²

Another of Woodlock's predecessors, Neil McCabe, had similar problems to contend with. Writing from Cloghan in May 1869, the parish priest, Kieran Egan,

⁹⁹ Bartholomew Fitzpatrick to Kilduff, Mount Melleray, 24 Nov 1853; do. 25 Nov 1853, ArdDA.

¹⁰⁰ Bartholomew Fitzpatrick, Abbot, to Kilduff, Mount Melleray, 24 Nov 1853, ArdDA.

¹⁰¹ Bartholomew Fitzpatrick, Abbot, to Kilduff, Mount Melleray 9 May 1854, ArdDA.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

complained about a fellow cleric, Thomas Briody. According to Egan, Briody was "daily sipping and drinking to excess.. ". He alleged that Briody generally dosed himself going to bed, "although he will make all sorts of protestations.. ".¹⁰³ He was right about the protestations because so offended was Briody by these charges that he asked McCabe to be released from Ardagh diocese. "I was sorry and grieved to hear from Your Lordship", he wrote, "that I was both a drunkard and a liar, it is heartrending for a poor priest to be brought under the notice of his Bishop by false reports by being charged with a crime the most damnable and diabolical of all crimes".¹⁰⁴

A month later, Briody was complaining that he had received no reply to his letter and he protested that he had given no scandal "with the exception of getting in the whiskey and if that be scandal, I know not what to say". He made a fine distinction by saying that the only scandal he had given was "*scandalum exceptum* for which I am not accountable before God or man since I did not give it wilfully". And once again, he requested an *exeat* from his bishop so that he could join his brother, a priest, in America.¹⁰⁵

This was followed shortly by another letter, in which Briody said that his parents were opposed to his going abroad, in particular his father, who was very ill. In a mood of repentance, he requested McCabe to admit him again to the diocese, stating that he was willing to go to any part of the diocese to which the bishop might send him. He thought that only a few priests knew that he had been suspended for a year and he had hoped that he might be restored again before the suspension became widely known.¹⁰⁶

A lay man from Carrick-on-Shannon wrote to complain in 1870 about what he called "the two old curates" in Ferbane and Cloone, who, he said, "have gone to the dogs drinking". The writer added that there were complaints from Mohill also.¹⁰⁷

These were some of the problems that Bartholomew Woodlock inherited when he became bishop of Ardagh in 1879. Coming from All Hallows College in Dublin, the new bishop relied heavily for advice on two senior priests of the diocese, Denis Grey and, in particular, Neil O'Flanagan of Granard. Certainly, in his approach to

¹⁰³ Kieran Egan to McCabe, Cloghan, King's Co., 23 May 1869, ArdDA.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Briody to McCabe, Clonlohan, 30 May 1869, ArdDA.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Briody to McCabe, Clonlohan, 7 June 1869, ArdDA.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Briody to McCabe, Clonlohan, 14 June 1869, ArdDA.

¹⁰⁷ P. Dawson to McCabe, Carrick-on-Shannon, 4 May 1870, ArdDA.

those of his priests with alcohol problems, Woodlock would seem to have been more lenient and more patient than, say, Gillooly or other contemporaries. He was not as quick to withdraw faculties or impose penalties and he seems, too, to have been more easily persuaded that such priests should be afforded further opportunities. As a result, individual cases tended to drag on over the years and those priests were moved about the diocese until it became more and more difficult to find P.P's who were willing to accept them. It may well have been that the protracted dealings in which he had to engage with these priests was an influential factor in his resignation of the see of Ardagh in 1895.

During the Woodlock years, there were a number of Ardagh priests who had the most severe alcohol problems. It may be that they often lived in the poorer and more remote areas where it was more likely that they would take comfort in alcohol. Sometimes, accommodation was poor and their mode of transport was on horseback or by horse and car. Many, in this situation, would have experienced loneliness and isolation. It should be remembered, too, that when they attended weddings and funerals, it was expected that they partake of the hospitality on offer, so that for those with a drink problem, these occasions were always very difficult.

These difficulties and Woodlock's attempts to deal with them are well illustrated in the sad case of Eugene Smyth. When his name was first mentioned in 1885, Smyth was staying with his brother at Kingstown in Dublin. As was the norm in such cases, Smyth declared that he had no difficulty in keeping the total abstinence pledge and that he had been grossly misrepresented both to the bishop and to the vicar general, Dr. O'Flanagan.¹⁰⁸ A more objective source was Smyth's parish priest, Thomas Cahill, who had visited Smyth at Kingstown and who found him "steady, sober and respectable".¹⁰⁹

On Smyth's return to his family home at Cortober, there was an appeal on his behalf from the local P.P., Michael Corcoran. According to Corcoran, Eugene Smyth was giving "the utmost satisfaction" and he had kept his pledge. He had assured Corcoran that his illness, while on retreat at Milltown Park, had not been caused by drink. Corcoran was convinced and he was now appealing to Woodlock to restore Smyth and give him a temporary appointment.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Eugene Smyth to Woodlock, 4 Tivoli Terrace Sth., Kingstown, 19 Aug 1885, ArdDA.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Cahill to Woodlock, Ballinagar, 8 Sept 1885, ArdDA.

¹¹⁰ M. Corcoran to Woodlock, Parochial House, Gowra, 10 Sept 1885, ArdDA.

This was done and the parish priest of Ballinagar, Thomas Cahill, made a determined attempt to help Eugene Smyth to overcome his difficulty, but in March 1886, Cahill wrote to say that he had done all in his power but that Smyth could not "be induced to give up his evil habits". He described Smyth as "a very sad disappointment" and he requested that he be replaced by a more able curate.¹¹¹

Smyth was duly removed but he now found himself at the tender mercies of one Patrick Canon Sheridan, the notorious parish priest of Ferbane, with whom the most sober of curates had serious disagreements. Eugene Smyth was unhappy from the start. He had been sent to Ferbane on a trial basis and Sheridan had threatened to rule him "with a rod of iron". The apologetic Smyth wrote to Woodlock, not, he said, by way of complaint, but in order that the spiritual head and director of the diocese should know the true state of affairs. His principal complaint was a shortage of funds and he requested the bishop's permission to be allowed to collect the oats money before the retreat. "I am poor and no wonder", he moaned.¹¹²

One must seriously question the bishop's wisdom in sending so vulnerable and gentle a person as Eugene Smyth to serve under the tyrannical Sheridan. It could not last and by November of the same year, Smyth was back with his brother, James, at Kingstown. James Smyth told Woodlock that Eugene had agreed to go on retreat to Milltown Park. He appealed "on his mother's and my account if not on his own" that the bishop would grant Eugene whatever faculties were necessary during his stay in Dublin.¹¹³ James Smyth kept a close watch on his "unfortunate brother", so much so that Eugene complained of "too stringent supervision" and at one point, he registered his protest by disappearing from the Kingstown house for a number of days.¹¹⁴

Having been informed by Woodlock that no vacancies existed in Ardagh diocese, Eugene Smyth set about securing a temporary appointment in Dublin. To this end, he wrote to Woodlock, requesting that the bishop write to the archdeacon in Dublin and then, he and his brother would follow up with a visit.¹¹⁵ This request was supported by a letter from his brother, who stated that Eugene would be most anxious "if left long idle".¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Thomas Cahill to Woodlock, Ballinagar, 6 March 1886, ArdDA.

¹¹² Eugene Smyth C.C. to Woodlock, Ferbane, 18 March 1886, ArdDA.

¹¹³ James Smyth to Woodlock, 4 Tivoli Terrace Sth., Kingstown, 11 Oct 1886, ArdDA.

¹¹⁴ James Smyth to Woodlock, 4 Tivoli Terrace Sth., Kingstown, 4 Jan 1887; 4 Jan 1887 (late), ArdDA.

¹¹⁵ Eugene Smyth to Woodlock, 4 Tivoli Terrace Sth., Kingstown, 5 Jan 1887, ArdDA.

¹¹⁶ James Smyth to Woodlock, 4 Tivoli Terrace Sth., Kingstown, 9 Jan 1887, ArdDA.

Given the difficulties that Archbishop Walsh of Dublin was experiencing in his own diocese, it was most unlikely that a priest with Eugene Smyth's record would be considered, even for a temporary post. Nevertheless, Woodlock did furnish him with a letter of introduction and the two Smyths called on the archdeacon, also named Walsh. The response was predictable, there was no vacancy in the diocese, not even for temporary duty; in fact, there was a difficulty in procuring a curacy for one of their own priests who had returned from America. Meantime, the archdeacon promised to do all that he could.¹¹⁷ James Smyth added his voice, pointing out once more that a "prolonged idleness" was a source of anxiety to his brother and to himself.¹¹⁸

In May 1887, James Smyth wrote a long letter to Woodlock. Eugene was back in Ardagh diocese and he had been given a temporary appointment in Gortlettera but he had resumed his drinking. James Smyth made a telling point to Woodlock when he said: "I was afraid of Gortlettera, it is so isolated and thought it a pity he could not have been where friendly control and supervision could reach him". He then asked: "Could nothing be done to save the little reason and religion left him before all is gone. Could he not be sent to some institution like Mount Melleray where perhaps he would yet become useful and worth his keeping". Then the disillusioned James stated with a sad finality: "As for me, my Lord, I must say with the deepest pain of heart that I am done with him" and he told how he had once more paid a debt, which Eugene had failed to honour. "I cannot allow him here again disgracing me and scandalising his sacred calling and I can't go to Gortletterera", he continued, "it would do no good, besides I fear I would be tempted to use violence towards him". James complained that Eugene's conduct towards him had been "so unbrotherly and ungrateful" and he felt that to send him to the family home at Cortober would be "to seriously endanger the lives of his mother and delicate sister". Finally, James Smyth expressed his fear that if his brother were removed to an institution such as Melleray, "the worst must happen and it bleeds my heart to anticipate such a fate for a brother once good and affectionate but my kind Lord, my efforts cannot avert it".¹¹⁹ Despite the feelings of frustration and even anger that are evident in this letter, James Smyth did, in fact, continue to take an interest in his brother's welfare.

The parish priest of Gowna, Michael Corcoran, was still interested in Eugene Smyth's welfare and he visited him in Dublin in January 1888. He found him "perfectly recovered" and he suggested to Woodlock that a mission be found for him.

¹¹⁷ Eugene Smyth to Woodlock, 4 Tivoli Terrace Sth., Kingstown, 12 Jan 1887, ArdDA.

¹¹⁸ James Smyth to Woodlock, 4 Tivoli Terrace Sth., Kingstown, 28 Jan 1887, ArdDA.

¹¹⁹ James Smyth to Woodlock, Kingstown, 1 May 1887, ArdDA.

Corcoran, like others, favoured a mission abroad and he recommended Liverpool,¹²⁰ as if somehow Smyth was to leave his problem behind. Or it may be that Corcoran's reasoning was that if scandal must be given, then it was better that it be given abroad. The chances, however, of Smyth obtaining a mission at home or abroad were becoming more remote and in May, Corcoran declared that there was no hope, unless Smyth were given a temporary appointment at home first. He also stated that James Smyth would not continue to pay for his brother and that, if a mission could not be found for him, then "he must only come to stop with his friends".¹²¹

Eugene Smyth, however, was fast running out of friends. There was no relief and as his problem worsened, he wrote to parish priests, with whom he had formerly worked, in the vain hope that they might have him back. "Trusting in God you will try to forget the past and bring me back to you to be an exemplary priest" was the nature of his pleading with these P.P's.¹²² Unfortunately, Smyth continued to drink in the meantime and two weeks later, Corcoran reported that Smyth was ready to go to the St. John of God hospital at Stillorgan.¹²³

It was obvious that it would now be extremely difficult to find any Ardagh parish priest who was prepared to take Smyth as assistant, even on a temporary basis. In 1892, he went to Patrick Fitzgerald at Legan, Lenamore, but under very strict conditions. However, in August, Fitzgerald was writing to inform Woodlock that Smyth had gone missing and that he himself had to attend to all the parish duties for the past fortnight. "There is no doubt that his taking drink accounts for his non-appearance and for his non-attendance of the duties of the parish", Fitzgerald remarked, adding that Smyth had violated all the conditions laid down by Woodlock. Having now no hope of any improvement in Smyth's conduct, Fitzgerald declared himself "quite unequal to the anxiety and worry of having him as curate any longer".¹²⁴

It appears that Woodlock decided to check out the situation for himself, as, in his next letter to the bishop, Smyth apologised for not being at home when Woodlock called. Smyth then went on to complain of Fitzgerald's treatment of him, claiming that the P.P. had been most unkind to him. This letter, which is most confused and may well have been written under the influence of alcohol, ends with Smyth expressing a

¹²⁰ Letter in Corcoran's hand, Gowna, 18 Jan 1888, ArdDA.

¹²¹ M. Corcoran to Woodlock, Gowna, 19 May 1888, ArdDA.

¹²² Eugene Smyth to Canon Grey, Cortober, Gowna, Co. Cavan, 5 Sept 1889, ArdDA.

¹²³ M. Corcoran to Woodlock, Gowna, 18 Sept 1889, ArdDA.

¹²⁴ P. Fitzgerald to Woodlock, Legan, Lenamore, 5 Aug 1892, ArdDA.

desire to join a religious order. "I am disgusted with the deceit and treachery of the outer world", he declared.¹²⁵

The upshot was that Smyth was back at his mother's place in Cortober, from where he wrote to Woodlock. His latest request to the bishop was to find him a suitable place of retirement that he might "be removed as soon as possible from the gaze of the public, as well as from the deceit of the sinful world". He had been to the doctor, who had "advised a stimulant" and, even at this stage, Smyth was not prepared to admit that alcohol was the cause of his troubles.¹²⁶ This letter was quickly followed by another, in which Smyth asked to be allowed to travel to America, where he had ecclesiastical friends and some relatives. He told Woodlock that his brother was very displeased with him and he did not expect any further assistance from that quarter.¹²⁷

A report from Michael Corcoran the following month showed that Smyth was still in severe difficulties. "By threats and intimidation, he forces his poor old mother and sister, the only persons in the house with him, to give him money to procure drink", Corcoran informed Woodlock and he urged the bishop to find a place for Smyth. Corcoran had written to James Smyth, asking him to contribute £18 a year and to ascertain if he would agree to have Eugene committed to the hospital in Stillorgan. Failing that, Corcoran was of the opinion that a place might be found in Belgium.¹²⁸

Approaches were made to Ghent in Belgium where the order of St. John of God had an institution similar to that in Stillorgan. They were prepared to accept Smyth and a Fr. Maguire at £60 a year.¹²⁹ Smyth, however, would not agree to travel and Corcoran had further stories to report of his drinking and of "grievous immoralities alleged against him". Since Smyth was unwilling to go to Belgium, Corcoran's latest suggestion was that he should "put off the priestly garb and go to America". This suggestion seems to have been prompted more by Corcoran's fear of scandal than from concern for Eugene Smyth, as Corcoran stated: "I know he would be open to great danger in America but at least there would be less danger of scandal if he could be induced to put on lay attire".¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Eugene Smyth to Woodlock, Legan, Lenamore, 10 Aug 1892, ArdDA.

¹²⁶ Eugene Smyth to Woodlock, Cortober, Arva, Co. Cavan, 18 Aug 1892, ArdDA.

¹²⁷ Eugene Smyth to Woodlock, Cortober, Arva, Co. Cavan, 22 Aug 1892, ArdDA.

¹²⁸ M. Corcoran to Woodlock, Gowna, 10 Sept 1892, ArdDA.

¹²⁹ J. Smyth to Woodlock, Columbkille, Granard, 16 Sept 1892, ArdDA.

¹³⁰ M. Corcoran to Woodlock, Gowna, 10 Dec 1892, ArdDA.

Eugene Smyth was befriended by Patrick Kearney, parish priest of Moate, who was prepared to give him a trial. It was Kearney's opinion that the troubled priest should seek to enter a religious order and he pleaded with Woodlock not to treat Smyth harshly or censure him in any way. The P.P. was sceptical, however, of Smyth being able to continue anywhere else when he did not fare well in Moate. Kearney mentioned that he was approaching the Vincentians "or some other recognised order" with a view to having Smyth accepted as a member.¹³¹

Eugene Smyth's problems with alcohol were so severe that they did not easily admit of any satisfactory solution. Between the years 1885 to 1892, he had been tried in at least five different parishes and each time he had been forced to return to hospital or to the family home at Cortober. Bartholomew Woodlock's reluctance to suspend Smyth permanently from the mission meant that the bishop was prepared to appoint Smyth to any parish priest who would have him, as is demonstrated clearly by the decisions to appoint him to a parish priest as tyrannical as Patrick Sheridan of Ferbane and to a parish as remote as Gortlettera. Smyth's case also illustrates graphically the difficulties caused for the families of the individual priests in this situation. Eugene Smyth's brother, James, was driven to the point of severing his relationship with the troubled priest and the priest's drinking caused difficulties for his aging mother and his sister in the family home.

Closely linked with the case of Eugene Smyth is that of Philip Duffy, whose family also came from Cortober. Philip was one of four Duffy priests mentioned as having serious drink problems in the Ardagh diocese during Woodlock's episcopate. It is clear from the correspondence relating to Philip Duffy that his problems were ongoing, as it had already been suggested to him that he should move to Sydney, Australia. Duffy himself was opposed to such a move, arguing that the priests and people would say that he was compelled to follow this course and so leave the diocese "under a cloud". He was prepared, however, to consider such a move if there were no prospects for him in Ardagh.¹³²

In his next letter, Duffy claimed that his family was opposed to his going on a foreign mission, and given the severity of Duffy's problem, this seems entirely plausible. He believed that it would hasten "very considerably" his father's death. He appealed to Woodlock for one chance to redeem himself - "I am troubled and annoyed

¹³¹Patrick Kearney to Woodlock, Moate, Saturday night, [no year], ArdDA.

¹³² Philip Duffy to Woodlock, Gowna, Co. Cavan, 14 Jan 1885, ArdDA.

and the case so serious that I cannot well decide for myself", he wrote, adding that he was waiting to consult with his brother.¹³³

The problem was not going to be resolved simply by Duffy removing himself from Ardagh and like Eugene Smyth, Duffy went to stay at Kingstown in 1885, where he remained for three months. He had stayed at Brassil's Hotel and he referred Woodlock to the proprietress to dispell the rumours reaching the bishop. He had also stayed with Fr. Mahon in Ballymahon for a time, taking nothing but "ginger ale and soda and milk". Again like Smyth, he had been to see the archbishop of Dublin, who was going to Rome but who, said Duffy, had promised that, should there be a vacancy on his return, "he would do what he could on the matter". "I knew however", Duffy remarked, "that the matter rested with your Lordship and that one word from you would secure the place for me". Duffy now requested that he be allowed to make a week's retreat at Longford College. At the time of writing, he was staying at his father's and he described his life as "most miserable, thinking of the past and not knowing what is before me in future". He referred again to his old, infirm father, who had no means of support for him, "having a large and young family all as yet unprovided for". Duffy then asserted that he should be given a chance, as other priests he knew had received "not one chance but two or three".¹³⁴ The bishop's suggestion was that Duffy go to Rome in search of a mission, no doubt as desperate a measure as it sounds. But before going there, Duffy wished it to be understood that in doing this, he was not forfeiting his claim to a place in Ardagh. He was, he said, "anxious to go off as soon as possible", as he did not see the use of wasting his time "and exposing my position here".¹³⁵

There was no solace for Duffy in Rome, as Corcoran, the parish priest who had also taken an interest in Eugene Smyth's case, reported. The P.P. informed Woodlock in 1888 that, although he had sent Philip Duffy £5, the priest had said that this would barely cover his hotel and other expenses since he left Assissi and that he had no money to take him home. Corcoran was writing to him to say that the bishop would not send any more money and that Duffy must look to his friends for assistance. Provision had been made for Duffy to go to a Capuchin convent, although the priest himself seemed to think he would get a mission on his return.¹³⁶ Two years later, Duffy sent Woodlock £2.10s. as part payment of this £5. He excused the delay by stating, "no person knows better than your Lordship the very limited revenues at my command.

¹³³ Philip Duffy to Woodlock, Gowna, Co. Cavan, 22 Jan 1885, ArdDA.

¹³⁴ Philip Duffy to Woodlock, Gowna, Co. Cavan, 18 Sept 1885, ArdDA.

¹³⁵ Philip Duffy to Woodlock, Gowna, Co. Cavan, 2 Oct 1887, ArdDA.

¹³⁶ M. Corcoran to Woodlock, Gowna, 19 May 1888, ArdDA.

Suffice it to say that were it not for the kindness of friends I could not make ends meet".¹³⁷

In 1892, Duffy did receive an appointment to Cloone parish but under very strict conditions. He was to be curate to Farrell Sheridan, administrator of the parish,¹³⁸ but a month had not passed when Sheridan was requesting that Duffy be removed. The offending curate had failed to turn up for Sunday mass and Sheridan was now asking for "a more prudent assistant". "As far as I can see", the administrator commented, "I am living amongst a most censorious people".¹³⁹ Duffy was summoned to appear before the bishop to explain his failure to say mass and on his way home, he called on the vicar general, Neil O'Flanagan, at Granard. He told O'Flanagan that the bishop had accepted his explanation but O'Flanagan was not impressed, especially as Duffy was "under the influence".¹⁴⁰ The bishop wrote to Joseph Hoare, P.P. Carrick-on-Shannon, to convey to Sheridan that Duffy did not have permission to say mass or hear confessions.¹⁴¹ Hoare conveyed this message to Sheridan and gave his opinion that Duffy ought to be "sternly dealt with".¹⁴²

The parallels with Eugene Smyth's case continued, as Patrick Kearney, a friend to Smyth, was asked to keep Duffy as curate on a trial basis. Before long, the P.P. declared that he did not wish to retain Duffy as curate and that, if ordered to do so, he would consider himself very badly treated.¹⁴³ And as 1892 had been a crucial year for Eugene Smyth, so it was for Philip Duffy. In this year, Duffy, like Smyth, was based at the family home in Cortober, Gowna. He was most unhappy and, not being allowed to celebrate mass, he did not like to appear in public and he was confident that Canon Sheridan would accept him as a curate.¹⁴⁴

The troubled curate was obliged to spend some time in Dublin and while there, it appears that he was involved in a fracas which had resulted in a court case. Writing from Cortober, Duffy denied the allegations and he referred the bishop to the chief of police at Dublin Castle, who, he was confident, would "give the grounds if any of such a serious charge against my character". He complained again about not being allowed to say mass, arguing that the people of the parish would begin to suspect that he had

¹³⁷ Philip Duffy to Woodlock, Loughduff, Cavan, 13 May 1891, ArdDA.

¹³⁸ Philip Duffy to Woodlock, Loughduff, Cavan, 23 May 1892, ArdDA.

¹³⁹ Farrell Sheridan to Woodlock, Cloone, 19 June 1892, ArdDA.

¹⁴⁰ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 27 June 1892, ArdDA.

¹⁴¹ B. Woodlock to Hoare, Longford, 28 June 1892, (copy), ArdDA.

¹⁴² Joseph Hoare to Woodlock, St. Mary's, Carrick-on-Shannon, 19 June [1892], ArdDA.

¹⁴³ Patrick Kearney to Woodlock, St. Patrick's, Moate, 26 Nov, [no year], ArdDA.

¹⁴⁴ Philip Duffy to Woodlock, Cortober, Gowna, Cavan, 19 Aug 1892, ArdDA.

done something wrong. Then, in a clear reference to Eugene Smyth, he said: "perhaps my name has been some way mixed up with the affairs of another person whose case I fear is rather freely discussed by the people of this locality". Duffy stated that he was prepared to go abroad to seek a living, if necessary.¹⁴⁵

The parish priest of Gowna, Michael Corcoran, was opposed to Duffy receiving permission to celebrate mass. He referred to the alleged incident in Dublin, promising to make inquiries from James Smyth. Duffy had not been brought to court himself but the case had been heard and sentence passed.¹⁴⁶ There the Duffy correspondence ends but one must conclude that, as in the case of Eugene Smyth, the matter dragged on, as there is no evidence of any dramatic change in the situation.

The case of Philip Maguire, another Ardagh priest with a very serious drink problem, is also worth mentioning in that it demonstrates how Woodlock's innate kindness in dealing with these priests and his reluctance to invoke the full severity of the law could often compound the difficulties at parish level. Of all the cases mentioned, Philip Maguire's is probably the most serious and it continued for eleven years of Woodlock's episcopate. As in the other cases, it is clear from the nature of the correspondence that Maguire's problems were already well known before they were brought to Woodlock's notice.

In October 1881, Patrick Reddy, P.P. Keadue, reported that the conduct of Philip Maguire, then his curate, was "the reverse of satisfactory" and it filled him with grave apprehension.¹⁴⁷ Reddy's foreboding of grave apprehension was proved correct and only twelve days later, he was writing to Woodlock to inform him that Maguire had come home "in a state of bordering on intoxication and with some brief intervals has remained in this condition". The P.P. described how he had locked up all the drink to keep it from Maguire but, he continued, Maguire went one day to a drawer that Reddy had forgotten to lock "and drank at one swoop two bottles of champagne". "If he saw a bottle", Reddy added, "he would run to it and drink before you could stop his hand". The P.P. complained that, although Maguire had promised not to drink before dinner, "he invariably slips down to the village to buy drink". Reddy had done his best to conceal the curate's problems from the people but some of them knew and the local doctor had described the priest's condition as "wretchedly sick from excessive drink".

¹⁴⁵ Philip Duffy to Woodlock, Cortober, Gowna, Cavan, 6 Dec 1892, ArdDA.

¹⁴⁶ M. Corcoran to Woodlock, Gowna, 10 Dec 1892, ArdDA.

¹⁴⁷ P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, 10 Oct 1881, ArdDA.

The P.P. then requested the bishop to remove Maguire and to place him with some other P.P. who would have more influence over him.¹⁴⁸

When Philip Maguire was confronted by the dean, Neil O'Flanagan, he denied any neglect of duty and he would not agree to go to Belgium. He complained that Reddy had not brought the charges "before his face" and so he had had no opportunity of defending himself. He complained, too, that from the beginning, Reddy was determined to be rid of him. "He appears in excellent health", O'Flanagan wrote of Maguire, "and as he is thoroughly frightened now, he might reform if he got another chance". If Maguire did not get a mission, he would have to depend on the sick priests' fund, as in O'Flanagan's opinion, he would have no chance of receiving private contributions from priests.¹⁴⁹ This opinion was borne out by Daniel Grey of Drumshambo, who informed Woodlock that Maguire was staying with his mother. Grey stated that the priests of the diocese "would not give him a farthing from the fund" and that, if he did receive money, many of them would no longer subscribe to it.¹⁵⁰ A place was found for Maguire at St. Patrick's hospital, where the bishop agreed to maintain him for a time.¹⁵¹

In 1883, when Maguire had returned once more to the mission, this time as curate in Cloone parish, the P.P., Francis O'Beirne, wrote to Woodlock to complain. He told how Maguire had been drinking heavily, that he had gone to a public house and on his return, he had been carousing in his rooms. He told, too, a story of the time when, following a confirmation dinner, he had found Maguire in a "Protestant hotel". When the P.P. tried to persuade him to come with him, Maguire "appeared intent on quarrelling" and he complained that Maguire had attempted to throw him from the footpath. "He was not *compos*", said the aggrieved P.P., "if he were I'm sure he would not do any such thing but I often heard he is dangerous at certain times". The P.P. was compelled to leave Maguire behind him and up to the time of writing, he had not seen him.¹⁵²

Maguire's next posting was to Killoe, Longford, and the P.P., John Briody, objected strongly to the appointment of "one whose failings are as commonly known here as the sun in the firmament". Briody added that Maguire's housekeeper, "his greatest misfortune", was from that area and he wished to protest most strongly about

¹⁴⁸ P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, 22 Oct 1881, ArdDA.

¹⁴⁹ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 29 Dec 1881, ArdDA.

¹⁵⁰ D. Grey to Woodlock, Drumshambo, 26 Dec [1881], ArdDA.

¹⁵¹ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 1 March 1882, ArdDA.

¹⁵² Francis O'Beirne to Woodlock, Cloone, 19 Oct 1883, ArdDA.

an appointment which, if persevered with, would break his spirit.¹⁵³ For a time, though, Maguire fared well at Killoe and the main complaint against him was that he was hard of hearing. He spoke loudly in the confessional and could be heard by people "at a considerable distance". Everything else, the P.P. reported, was "fairly satisfactory".¹⁵⁴ This did not last and, three months later, Briody informed the bishop that Maguire was again drinking to excess and that he was very violent in that state. "People are talking of the state of things", he ended, "I hope you will see your way to a remedy".¹⁵⁵

The bishop was hearing from other sources, too, of Maguire's activities in Killoe. James Smyth, P.P. Columbkille related how, on his way home from Killoe on a Sunday night, he had seen Maguire leave a public house near Dunbeggan chapel "in a very disorderly intoxicated state". At that time, according to Smyth, Maguire was residing with his brother, Barney, in a poor log cabin, as another brother, Francis, "a fairly sensible man" had refused to admit him. "He has crowds coming to him for cures and miracles as many as to Knock", Smyth added and he advised Woodlock not to give Maguire any money. He also requested that Maguire be removed from the area, as he was "cooperating with his brother in scandalising our people".¹⁵⁶

By the time Smyth wrote again, Maguire had gone to Ghent, Belgium, where he was described as "contented". There Maguire met with two other Irish priests, one of whom was with him at Maynooth. "The only grievance he has", Smyth remarked, "is that whilst the other priests get their intentions according as they discharge them, the President asked him would he be pleased to leave the intentions in the hands of the Superior and that he would supply him from this source with any extra he might require". This was obviously a ploy by the superior to prevent Maguire from having money to spend. Maguire resented it and he hoped that the bishop would object to "such a humiliating condition".¹⁵⁷

Six years later, in 1892, Maguire was in Ghent again and the superior there was objecting to keeping both Maguire and Eugene Smyth for £60 a year. By this time, though, Maguire was unhappy and he was complaining that he had gone there on the understanding that he was to be taken home after a time and given a position in the

¹⁵³ John Briody to Woodlock, Killoe, Longford, 21 Oct 1885, ArdDA.

¹⁵⁴ John Briody P.P. to Woodlock, Killoe, Longford, 10 Nov 1885, ArdDA.

¹⁵⁵ John Briody P.P. to Woodlock, Killoe, 2 Feb 1886, ArdDA.

¹⁵⁶ J. Smyth to Woodlock, Columbkille, 22 Feb 1886, ArdDA.

¹⁵⁷ J. Smyth to Woodlock, Columbkille, Granard, 24 Nov 1886, ArdDA.

diocese. He had stated that he would not remain there much longer.¹⁵⁸ This was confirmed by the superior, A. de Riemackke of the Belgian order of the Brothers of St. John of God, who insisted that the terms were £40 a year for each priest, each quarter to be paid in advance and he requested Woodlock to inform Maguire of his new destination.¹⁵⁹

There the correspondence relating to Philip Maguire ends and again there is the strong impression of a priest failing to come to terms with his problem and a bishop at his wits' end in trying to find some satisfactory solution. In the case of another Maguire, Eugene, the very same impression is conveyed. Eugene Maguire's drink problem was a serious one but it was the effects of alcohol on his behaviour in public that made it a matter of urgency for the diocesan authorities. In November 1883, Francis Donohue, parish priest of Mohill, related how Maguire came into town accompanied by a female parishioner and drank in her company "until he gave a great deal of disedification and scandal". His offence, Donohue continued, was compounded by the fact that he "attempted familiarities with two shopkeepers wives, very respectable women". One of the women had reported the incident to Donohue himself while the other had told Fr. O'Farrell that Maguire had tried to embrace her in the public shop in the presence of some half dozen people. "And as far as drink is concerned", Donohue commented, "the other C.C. is just as addicted to it and my Lord, it places the Mohill priests in a very unpleasant position to have those priests coming about it at all".¹⁶⁰

This report was substantiated by another from Daniel Grey, P.P. Drumshambo, who told how Maguire had appeared in a drunken state at mass. It was "the topic of conversation in almost every house" and after Maguire had called on Grey, he went to the public house and on his return, was scarcely able to walk. When Maguire saw Grey, he "darted into the closets" where he remained until Grey knocked at the door and told him that dinner was ready. Maguire had no wish to eat and he said to Grey: "I did it, you have me now, what are you going to do with me". Then he added: "I do not care a jot for any man, I have my own, I will not be advised by any person". Grey complained further that, on that day, Maguire had gone drinking "with a common soldier and his woman.. ". Grey then pleaded with Woodlock to remove Eugene Maguire, asking the bishop to come "and put a stop to this state of things".¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ J. Smyth to Woodlock, Columbkille, Granard, 16 Sept 1892, ArdDA.

¹⁵⁹ A. de Riemackke, Dis(?) des freres de Jean de Dieu, Ghent, 23 Sept 1892, ArdDA.

¹⁶⁰ F. Donohue to Woodlock, Mohill, 8 Nov 1883, ArdDA.

¹⁶¹ D. Grey to Woodlock, Drumshambo, 15 March [1883], ArdDA.

Three days later, there was another letter from Grey, in which he stated that Maguire could not be persuaded to go to mass or read his office. Describing Maguire's appearance as that of "a perfect lunatic", Grey told how the priest had made for the public house when he knew that Grey himself was engaged at benediction. "He had only a few moments start of me", the P.P. reported, "and I found him in a bedroom without light of any kind awaiting the arrival of whiskey and soda". Maguire was eventually persuaded to come home with Grey but he remained in bed all the following day. He finally rose only when Grey announced that the bishop was expected. Grey also felt that the bishop should acquaint himself fully with the "past career" of priests such as Maguire and James Dawson by seeking information from priests who had had them as curates.¹⁶² In Grey's opinion, neither of these two priests should be on the mission "for years".¹⁶³

The James Dawson mentioned here wrote in defence of his friend, Eugene Maguire. Dawson could hardly be described as a credible witness and his testimony was unlikely to influence the bishop in Maguire's favour. He argued that Maguire was the victim of a conspiracy. He went on to tell a strange story about a woman who had come to his place to tempt him "to commit sin" and who had told him a story of how Canon Grey's curate "often put a certain girl into bed etc. and that he had not a bit worse luck". Dawson, who felt that he himself was the victim of a conspiracy in Drumcong, summed up by stating, enigmatically, that "Fr. Maguire placed himself in a spark and the rest was done for him".¹⁶⁴

Eugene Maguire's response to the allegations against him was to bring some of his own against his parish priest, Daniel Grey, and he wished to meet the bishop to discuss them. The vicar general, Neil O'Flanagan, was of the opinion that there was nothing to be gained from such a meeting, as it "would only be a repetition and a denial of the charges and in any event, the affair has no bearing on Fr. Maguire's position - either to palliate or to justify his own fall in Drumshambo". O'Flanagan's view was that Maguire had not taken drink before mass on that Sunday, but that he was suffering from the effects of the previous night's drinking. He hoped that the bishop could see his way to carry out the original plan of getting Maguire to Belgium. "I don't think he is altogether bad or irredeemable" was the vicar general's conclusion.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² D. Grey to Woodlock, Drumshambo, 8 Sept [1883], ArdDA.

¹⁶³ D. Grey to Woodlock, Drumshambo, 21 Sept [1883], ArdDA.

¹⁶⁴ J. Dawson to Woodlock, Tashiny, Mullingar, 19 Aug 1886, ArdDA.

¹⁶⁵ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 29 Aug 1886, ArdDA.

In January 1887, O'Flanagan advised the bishop that, as Eugene Maguire was progressing so well, he might be given another trial in Ballymahon. "It will be a safe place", he said, "and I dare say they don't wish to keep him longer in Melleray and he has no place to go to".¹⁶⁶ Clearly once again, the problem of the alcoholic priest was not resolved and Eugene Maguire, like others in his situation, found himself on the round of spending time in retreat before being tried in yet another parish.

"It is scarcely fair to send to any parish time after time priests who are merely on trial". This was the view of Daniel Grey, writing in 1887 in reference to Eugene Maguire and James Dawson, who, because of their drinking, found themselves being transferred frequently. Grey elaborated: "I fear the repeated falls in some districts causes many of the people to believe that every priest now and then gives way to a certain weakness".¹⁶⁷ In offering this observation, Grey was giving expression to the dilemma presented to prelates like Woodlock, who were prepared to take a more lenient line with priests whose drinking habits caused recurring problems. Woodlock probably saw the futility of serving such men with suspensions, although, when hard pressed, he did withdraw faculties. Nevertheless, when any of these priests gave any evidence of reform, Woodlock was prepared to offer them another chance. But after repeated trials and failures, the difficulty for the bishop then was - if these priests were not prepared to go abroad, where were they to be placed? And the problem for parish priests who had shown themselves to be more tolerant and accepting was that they were then likely to be visited with a succession of curates who drank to excess.

There were times when a particular priest was not acceptable to any of the parish priests in the diocese and, in that case, the bishop was obliged to persuade a P.P. to accept a curate, even on a trial basis. This was the case with James Dawson, a priest whose drinking seems to have affected his mental health as well as his behaviour. In 1881, Dawson was removed from the parish of Keadue. The parish priest there, Patrick Reddy, was one of those who was prepared to tolerate curates with alcohol problems, as Dawson was succeeded by Philip Maguire, mentioned above. "Between outgoing and incoming C.C.'s I have had enough of anxiety for one year" was Reddy's laconic comment.¹⁶⁸

Following a letter of recommendation from Fr. Carbery, a Jesuit priest at Milltown Park, Dublin,¹⁶⁹ Neil O'Flanagan suggested to the bishop that Dawson be

¹⁶⁶ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 17 Jan 1887, ArdDA.

¹⁶⁷ D. Grey to Woodlock, Drumshambo, 15 Jan 1887, ArdDA.

¹⁶⁸ P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, 20 Oct 1881, ArdDA.

¹⁶⁹ R. Carbery to Woodlock, Milltown Park, Dublin, 3 Dec 1884, ArdDA.

restored for a further trial in 1884.¹⁷⁰ There was then the difficulty of finding a suitable position or indeed any P.P. who was willing to take him as curate. O'Flanagan thought that Joseph Hoare, parish priest of Street, might be persuaded "when represented to him as a temporary expedient in the present state of the diocese". He doubted, though, that Hoare would allow Dawson to reside in the parochial house.¹⁷¹ Hoare was not too pleased with the suggestion, objecting on the grounds that the parish revenues would not sustain another priest. Nevertheless, O'Flanagan was insisting that Dawson be sent there after the Easter offerings.¹⁷² Hoare's response was as sarcastic as his acceptance of Dawson was reluctant. "It was very kind of his Lordship and yourself to ask me if I would take Fr. Dawson as curate", he replied, "I believe I have no canonical right to say I will not take him; nor have I any right to ask a favour that I should be allowed time to pay off a debt incurred in putting this house into repair. Secondly, that I should get a more able priest than the one you have in store for me. My answer is if the Bishop and yourself think this is the place you should send Fr. Dawson he shall be welcome".¹⁷³

The trial period was not a success and soon, Dawson was on the move again, this time as curate to Drumshambo. The complaints came pouring in. They included such seemingly trivial allegations as attempting to shake hands with a person at a confessional and going on a sick call without a hat. Dawson explained the confessional incident by saying that he was unwell and, when leaving the confessional, he made a sign to the people to go to another box. Daniel Grey thought that Dawson was looking well and did not have the appearance of one who had been indulging.¹⁷⁴

If it was Dawson's intention to offer a defence, then the letter he sent to Woodlock in October 1886 could only have had the opposite effect. As Grey remarked, his letters seemed to have been written "under very great excitement".¹⁷⁵ A short extract from Dawson's letter will suffice to make the point. "As to the 'temperance pledge' I trust and hope you will pardon me for saying it is a very slipshod term - it might mean anything and nothing. Sometimes it means spies, bullying calumny, not the life of a clergyman but that of a mad dog and no redress. Sometimes it means nothing but what anyone ought to be".¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 7 Dec 1884, ArdDA.

¹⁷¹ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 21 March 1885, ArdDA.

¹⁷² N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 26 March 1885, ArdDA.

¹⁷³ J. Hoare to O'Flanagan, Street, Rathowen, 25 March 1885, ArdDA.

¹⁷⁴ D. Grey to Woodlock, Drumshambo, 14 Nov [no year], ArdDA.

¹⁷⁵ D. Grey to Woodlock, Drumshambo, 6 Nov [no year], ArdDA.

¹⁷⁶ J. Dawson to Woodlock, Finea, Granard, 14 Sept 1886, ArdDA.

Dawson and Eugene Maguire were summoned to Longford, where they were censured.¹⁷⁷ This was alluded to by John Briody, P.P. Killoe, to whom Dawson was assigned in 1887. Briody reacted to the appointment in exactly the same manner as Hoare had done, making it clear that he would accept Dawson only if he was forced to do so. "I shall feel very miserable with Rev. James Dawson after some public censure on him at a conference in Longford last October", Briody wrote, before making clear his intention to shun the new curate - "I must decline any intercourse with him but he can do his duty as they shall be marked on notice paper I shall so direct him".¹⁷⁸

James McDevitt, bishop of Raphoe, was experiencing similar problems with a curate, Fr. Cullen. Daniel O'Donnell, P.P. Kinlough, protested to McDevitt about Cullen's appointment to that parish. O'Donnell was aware that in accepting priests like Cullen as curates, his parish might be seen as a place to which the bishop could appoint priests with alcohol problems. "It is not fair", O'Donnell had written, "that I should be a second time saddled with a man who is not desirable and will take my turn of him and such as he but I hope I will not be burdened with them during my life...." McDevitt, in response, reminded the parish priest of a letter he had written some months earlier in which he had praised Cullen, saying that if Cullen were restored on condition of total abstinence, then there would be no danger of a relapse. The bishop also reminded O'Donnell of his plea to have Cullen restored to the mission and of his words that Cullen was "beloved in Dunglow in the whole parish...."¹⁷⁹ The import of the bishop's letter was that, while O'Donnell was anxious that Cullen be restored, he would prefer him to be appointed to some other parish.

By the following year, Cullen had been transferred again, this time to Glena. Parish priest James McFadden was as unhappy as Daniel O'Donnell and reported that the curate had gone missing. McFadden had hoped that some action would be taken after Cullen's "outrageous conduct" before priests and people at the mission in the parish earlier in the year. While acknowledging the bishop's dilemma, McFadden thought that other parish priests should have to "suffer a proportionate share of the suffering that the people of this parish and I have had to bear".¹⁸⁰ Strangely enough, Cullen reappeared in Kinlough, the parish of Daniel O'Donnell in 1874 but his basic problem was still unresolved. O'Donnell reported that Cullen was drinking but that, once again, he had promised to become a total abstainer if he was allowed to remain.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 14 Sept 1886, ArdDA.

¹⁷⁸ John Briody P.P. to Woodlock, Killoe, 2 Sept 1887, ArdDA.

¹⁷⁹ James McDevitt to Daniel O'Donnell, P.P., Letterkenny, 15 Jan 1870 (copy), RDA.

¹⁸⁰ James McFadden P.P. to McDevitt, Glena, 14 Dec 1871, RDA.

¹⁸¹ Daniel O'Donnell to McDevitt, Kinlough, 7 Oct 1874, RDA.

The bishop had similar difficulties with a namesake of his own, Peter McDevitt. In a letter to bishop in July 1872, McDevitt excused his drinking on the grounds that he and his sister were depressed following the death of their father and he requested a transfer to Ardara.¹⁸²

Four years later, Peter McDevitt was curate in St. Johnston's parish when he was the subject of complaints from parish priest, Michael Martin. Martin pleaded with McDevitt's sister to prevail upon her brother to make a retreat in Dublin and to pledge total abstinence. If these conditions were fulfilled, Martin was prepared to plead his case with the bishop. "Poor man", Martin wrote to the bishop, "I feel deep sympathy for him and my Lord, I cannot in truth help saying that there would not be a better priest in your diocese if he only abstained from intoxicating drinks".¹⁸³ But McDevitt was finding it impossible to abstain from intoxicating drinks and the next report came from James McFadden who said that the unfortunate curate was "in delirium" and that he had been "notoriously incapable" while officiating in the graveyard and had said no prayers.¹⁸⁴ Peter McDevitt went on retreat to Mount Melleray where the Abbot promised to keep him until he was recalled.¹⁸⁵ But for Peter McDevitt the circle remained unbroken as again he took the pledge and again was appointed as curate, this time to Glenfin.¹⁸⁶

The majority of cases alluded to so far referred, for the most part, to curates and, of course, as long as their alcohol problems persisted, these priests were destined to remain curates and chaplains. But problems with alcohol were not confined to the lower orders of the clergy. Paul Cullen wrote to Propaganda in 1851 to complain about the performance of William Higgins, bishop of Ardagh. He said that Higgins "shuts himself up in his house for months on end and receives nobody, neither priests nor laymen. I believe he is letting himself be conquered by wine and his diocese is much neglected".¹⁸⁷ Later on, another bishop, Patrick Fallon of Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora, was the subject of an investigation by Propaganda when John MacEvelly, then bishop of Galway, was sent to examine charges of maladministration made against Fallon.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸² Peter McDevitt to McDevitt, Gortnacor, Milford, 20 July 1872, RDA.

¹⁸³ Michael Martin to McDevitt, St. Johnston's, Derry, 27 Oct 1876, RDA.

¹⁸⁴ James McFadden to McDevitt, Derrybeg, 6 March 1877, RDA.

¹⁸⁵ Bartholomew Fitzpatrick, Abbot, to McDevitt, Mount Melleray, Cappoquinn, Co. Waterford, 3 July 1877, RDA.

¹⁸⁶ Note signed by Peter McDevitt, Letterkenny, 5 March 1878; Footnote signed James McDevitt, RDA.

¹⁸⁷ Paul Cullen to Propaganda, 28 Sept 1851, quoted in Kerr, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁸⁸ Bane, *op. cit.*, p. 160

In the diocesan archives of Ardagh, Armagh and Dublin, there is a considerable amount of correspondence dealing with the problems of alcohol addiction. There are relatively fewer letters in Elphin and Raphoe, but in the Cashel archives there is scarcely any reference at all to the problem. What conclusions are to be drawn from this lacuna in the Cashel archives? Does it mean that Cashel priests were exemplary in their sobriety? Or does it mean that some of the diocesan authorities there took care to exclude from public scrutiny all such references? It is most unlikely that this lack of correspondence denotes a singular devotion to total abstinence among the Cashel clergy, especially when the problem was so serious and so prevalent in other dioceses.

The absence of such material is strange when, for instance, one considers the references by diarist, Thomas O'Carroll. In an entry for 25 September 1846, O'Carroll refers to a visit to the archbishop by his fellow curate and he writes: "he returned after six o'clock rather dispirited and produced a paper in which his Grace had written out instructions for his future conduct and prohibiting him under pain of suspension from drinking any sort of intoxicating drinks during the day and more than two ordinary tumblers of punch after dinner - a liberal allowance, no doubt, yet the prohibition is degrading".¹⁸⁹

In the later diary, in February 1862, James O'Carroll talks about Denis Meagher, parish priest of Upperchurch, turning to drink and relates how the P.P. was known to "have spent the greater part of the night wandering about the rooms of his house calling names to his curates and to his immediate relatives". The diarist then adds that Meagher was not "a confirmed drunkard" and that his evidence comes from priests who have known Meagher "well and long".¹⁹⁰

Another priest mentioned by James O'Carroll as having a drink problem is Michael Quinlan, a curate at Golden, who was suspended in June 1862 for "being drunk on the visitation and confirmation days". "The bishop saw him", O'Carroll notes, and it was said that Quinlan was reported by a "Protestant gentleman". The suspension came as a surprise to his fellow priests, who believed that, having been restored on a previous occasion, Quinlan drank only wine "at least in public". Six months later, Quinlan received an *exeat* from the archbishop and was preparing to move to Australia - "It is to be hoped he will respect himself more there than he did here" was the sentiment expressed by the diarist.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Diary of Thomas O'Carroll, 25 Sept 1846, CDA.

¹⁹⁰ Diary of James O'Carroll, 17 Feb 1862, CDA.

¹⁹¹ Diary of James O'Carroll, 3 Dec 1862, CDA.

From the biographical notes on Cashel priests, there are indications, too, that the clergy there were not entirely free of alcohol problems. William Berkery, a curate at Drum, had to resign from the mission because of his excessive drinking, as also had Patrick Darmody, who was moved to a number of parishes until he retired in 1881. Michael Duggan was curate in seven different parishes from his ordination in 1870. He retired in 1886 due to his drinking and he lived at Donegal Cottage, Clerihan until his death in 1914.¹⁹² Hoppen, in his book, states that when Croke became archbishop in 1875, a number of Cashel priests had alcohol problems and he cites the example of one priest who was removed from a carriage at Mallow railway station, having smashed the windows in a drunken fit.¹⁹³

Most telling of all is the evidence, presented earlier in this chapter, from James O'Carroll's diary, in which he speaks of the introduction of special laws by Dr Everard to curb the drinking habits of some of the priests.¹⁹⁴ This law was later reinforced by statutes such as that of the Provincial Synod of Munster in 1877. There is then sufficient evidence to show that Cashel was no exception in the matter of overindulgence in alcohol. What is less easy to explain is why there is such a dearth of information in the Cashel archives relating to any of these priests and their problems, since there is no apparent reason why the problems of clerical drinking would not have generated a similar amount of correspondence.

In Tuam diocese, although there is no worthwhile archival material surviving, there are indications that here too excessive drinking was a serious problem. John MacEvelly, who succeeded John MacHale as archbishop, and who campaigned consistently for the promotion of temperance, had to deal with the problem of alcohol among several parish priests. One of them was the well known and so-called Fenian priest, Patrick Lavelle, parish priest of Partry. MacEvelly, no friend of Lavelle's, described how the parish priest arrived at a priests' retreat "half-drunk" and when a parishioner complained of Lavelle's "falling sickness", MacEvelly dismissed it as "the effect of drunkenness".¹⁹⁵ In July 1883, MacEvelly stated that he had been obliged to "set aside three *Parochi* for utter incapacity or worse". "They were men who ought never be ordained much less made *Parochi*", the archbishop thundered.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Index of Cashel Clergy, Walter Skehan, CDA.

¹⁹³ Hoppen, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

¹⁹⁴ Diary of James O'Carroll, 15 May 1863, CDA.

¹⁹⁵ Bane, *op. cit.*, p.159

¹⁹⁶ John MacEvelly to Kirby, 22 July 1883, quoted in O Tuairisg, *op.cit.*, 1. 594.

It would appear that another parish priest at Partry, David Mylotte, also had a drink problem. As MacEvelly put it, Mylotte had fared badly "*propter ebrietatem et impudicitiam*". MacEvelly had informed the P.P. of the charges against him and had offered him a curacy elsewhere. Mylotte, who had written to the Cardinal Prefect to complain of his removal from the office of parish priest, was accepted by Archdeacon Cavanagh as a curate at Knock but, said MacEvelly, "has often been drunk since". MacEvelly, not the most tolerant of bishops, felt that Mylotte should now be put off the mission but the curate who had made the complaints in the first instance had since gone to Australia and "now", said the archbishop, "it is difficult to prove anything".¹⁹⁷

Conclusion

Amongst the difficulties confronting nineteenth century bishops, no single problem was to prove more vexatious or as impervious to satisfactory resolution as that of the alcoholic priest. Because of the public dimension of the problem, bishops were obliged to take prompt action but, unless the priest in question was prepared to commit himself - and succeed in effecting - a life of total abstinence, the problem could prove insoluble. All other measures offered only temporary relief. Ecclesiastical sanctions and suspensions from office were ultimately ineffective unless, as seems to have happened in the diocese of Elphin under Laurence Gillooly, the bishop was determined to keep the suspension in place and force the offending cleric into retirement. For someone as sensitive as Woodlock of Ardagh or as indecisive as Dixon of Armagh, who were not prepared to enforce the ultimate sanction, the problem was inevitably a recurring one. In those cases, it seems that as long as a parish priest could be found who was prepared accommodate such a priest, then there would always be one more chance. Neither could legislation provide the solution because statutes which forbade the abuse of alcohol amounted, in the case of priests afflicted with the problem, to little more than mere pious aspirations .

The problem was common to all age groups and all ranks. Of the number of cases alluded to in this study ^(36 out of 84 instances) 25 curates, 9 parish priests and 2 bishops were affected. Obviously, in the case of bishops and parish priests, the problem had not surfaced until they had been promoted, or at least, they had succeeded in maintaining sufficient control over their drinking until that time. The curates mentioned were of differing ages and it is difficult to assess when exactly the problem assumed such proportions as to merit immediate attention. For the curate with a serious alcohol problem it meant that

¹⁹⁷ John MacEvelly to Kirby, 17 Dec 1884, quoted in O Tuairisg, *op. cit.*, 1. 608.

his prospects of promotion were diminished and with each relapse, the likelihood of his being given responsibility for the management of a parish became ever more remote.

In attempting to quantify the extent of the alcohol problem among nineteenth century clergy, one must have regard to the nature of the problem and to the volume of letters which even one case could generate. One must also bear in mind that only those cases were brought to the attention of the authorities where priests' drinking was a matter of public knowledge, where priests were rendered incapable of functioning consistently and where the administration of the parish was seriously affected. It should be said, too, that from the evidence of the material in diocesan archives, the laity seemed to have adopted a sympathetic and tolerant attitude, since the number of complaints from lay people is relatively small.

An analysis of the correspondence in the Armagh diocesan archives reveals that, between the years 1853-1866, 22 priests are mentioned as having serious alcohol problems. For the seven years 1853-59, 8 priests with alcohol problems are mentioned. Given that the average number of priests active in the ministry in those years is about 125,¹⁹⁸ this means that the percentage of those with drink problems is 6%. However, the number recorded for the years 1860-66 is 17, or 14%. In Dublin diocese, the number is much lower. Over the years 1863-95, 35 priests in all are mentioned. For the 1860's, the figure is 6, which from an average of 280 priests,¹⁹⁹ is 2%. In the 1870's the figure is 9 priests or 3%. In the 1880's and 1890's, the figure increases to 15 and 13 priests respectively or 5% of the total. In Ardagh diocese, the number of priests with alcohol problems mentioned is 16 over the years 1879-1892. For the decade of the 1880's, the figure is 14 priests, which represents 14% of an average number of active clergymen of 98.²⁰⁰ In the rest of the fragmentary correspondence in the Ardagh archives, 4 priests, including the bishop William Higgins, are recorded as having alcohol problems.

From limited access to Raphoe diocesan archives, at least 7 priests with severe drinking problems can be counted between the years 1871-78. There is not sufficient information to arrive at an informed estimate and this is also the situation where other dioceses are concerned.

¹⁹⁸ Irish Catholic Directory, 1853, 1860, 1866.

¹⁹⁹ Irish Catholic Directory, 1860, 1866, 1868, 1869, 1890.

²⁰⁰ Irish Catholic Directory, 1853, 1880, 1890.

From the figures that are available, it is clear that the problem was much more widespread and serious among the rural clergy and it is obvious that isolation and loneliness were significant factors here. At least, for those in the urban situation, help and support were readily available and the companionship of the presbytery must have been most helpful for those who might otherwise have turned to drink. Even in the Dublin diocese, many of those who are mentioned lived in parishes in the more remote parts of counties Wicklow and Kildare. That said, it should also be noted that, paradoxically, it was most likely that those priests with serious alcohol problems would find themselves posted to parishes where it was estimated they would give least offence.

While these figures may not prove conclusively the extent of the problem, they do point to a human problem which was sufficiently significant to constitute a major source of worry for ecclesiastical superiors. Even in Dublin diocese, where the numbers of those with drink problems is considerably less, the authorities cannot have been too happy with the fact that the problem increased as the century progressed.

Chapter Eight

Problems of Discipline - Celibacy

For Catholic priests for whom a life of celibacy was obligatory, it was felt that it was necessary to introduce regulations governing their relations with women. As students in seminaries, contact with women was minimal and, during the vacations, conduct which was viewed as undue familiarity with women was duly reported. It was this thinking, too, that informed such laws as those of the synod of Thurles which forbade attendance at public concerts, theatres and dances. There were even specific regulations regarding the kind of woman who should be employed as housekeeper, the older *-superadulta -* and the plainer female being preferred.¹

Difficulties with the rule of celibacy

When compared with the volume of correspondence relating to the alcohol problems of the nineteenth century clergy, the number of letters relating to sexual improprieties or alleged breaches of the rule of celibacy is small indeed. It is true that such breaches of discipline were of a much more private nature and consequently, easier to conceal. Also, they did not have the same dramatic impact on parish administration, since it was possible, in theory at least, for a priest to be involved in a sexual relationship and still perform adequately the duties of his office. Yet, it must be said, that given the climate of opinion of the time and the public manner in which priests had to carry out their duties, it is most likely that even the hint of suspicion would have brought a number of complaining letters.

Such complaints as there are fall into different categories. There were, first of all, anonymous letters containing various allegations against priests who were candidates for promotion to the episcopacy. These letters were more often directed to Rome and usually came from opponents, either cleric or lay, of the particular priest. Sometimes such letters were sent to the archbishop of Dublin, on the assumption that he would be an influential voice in the choice of an Irish bishop. An example of this is a letter from "Some priests of Ardagh" which arrived on Paul Cullen's desk in June 1852. The letter made a number of allegations against Peter Dawson, V.G. P.P. Carrick-on-Shannon. Having accused Dawson of organising horse racing in Bundoran, the writer then alleged that "he was detected by the police in a house of bad fame" in the town of Ferbane. The writer also claimed that, while Dawson was

¹ *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae, MDCCCL.*

resident as a curate in the bishop's house, the female servants of the house "were obliged to quit in order to protect their virtue".² Presumably since accusations like this, even though anonymous and vindictive, were made against priests who were candidates for high office, discreet inquiries at least were made. In this particular case, it would appear that Paul Cullen made use of the information to exclude Dawson, who had been voted *dignissimus* by the priests of the diocese, and to promote his own favoured candidate, John Kilduff.³

Secondly, there were unsigned letters in which charges were made against individual priests not under consideration for promotion. These letters were either ignored by the authorities or, depending on a bishop's opinion of the priest in question, attempts were made to establish the truth or falsehood of the allegations. Occasionally, bishops considered the charges sufficiently well founded or they had corroborating evidence to warrant a more formal inquiry. Laurence Gillooly, bishop of Elphin, received a letter in September 1893, in which the anonymous writer from the parish of Ballymoe complained of a "libertine", who had brought "countless girls to misfortune". The writer gave the man's name as Trears and it was alleged that this man's house was a visiting place for the curates of the area - "It's not edifying for the parishioners to see and know these priests calling and eating and drinking at this house of ill fame". There was the claim, too, that Trears had nieces in the house and that each of the priests called for "his own favourite girl". According to the writer, Trears felt that he should not be blamed when "the priests are so fond of girls". The letter went on to say that one of the priests drove three young girls about in his car and that the P.P. had fallen from his car on his way "from drunken midnight sprees".⁴

Gillooly was sufficiently perturbed by the letter to request a priest, John Foley of Castlerea, to investigate the allegations. Foley began his report by saying that he would be surprised if there were any foundation for the allegations. At the last general station there, a priest had suggested a visit to the Trears house as a matter of courtesy before dinner, but Foley had declared that a visit there would be "very unpalatable to the P.P. who had assumed a very determined attitude towards the veteran culprit of the establishment". James Martin, the curate at Ballintubber, had called there twice to attend the old man who was ill and another priest called there occasionally when he came on business to town. Another priest, William Crofton, had called there and had spent three or four hours there "to the annoyance of the P.P." but, Foley reported, there

² Letter signed "Some priests of Ardagh" to Cullen, Longford, 22 June 1852, DDA.

³ James Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁴ Unsigned letter to Gillooly, 26 Sept 1893, EDA.

was no priest in the deanery to his knowledge who had spent "a considerable time" there. Foley's report concluded: "As far as I know the priests of this deanery are fully alive to the importance of sustaining the P.P. in the course he has adopted in the case in question".⁵

In the case of Peter Connolly, a curate at Sandyford, Dublin, in 1893, it would appear that Archbishop William Walsh had more evidence of wrongdoing than that contained in the poorly written anonymous letter which he received in January of that year. The writer, following instructions from a confessor, named three priests, including Connolly, who was said to have "half the poor young girls rooned about". The writer, a brother of one of the young girls, claimed that the priests had made "a hoor of her and she is not yet 19 years of age". There was also an allegation that these priests brought young girls to their houses "in the small hours of the morning" and kept them in their bedrooms. Sometimes, the letter continued, they kept these girls in their houses for a week at a time. The writer then appealed to Walsh to take action against the priests, swearing that what he had related was "the gospel truth".⁶

In the investigation which followed, further charges were made against Connolly. In a formal statement from Mrs. Bridget Martin "residing in Temple Carrig", she spoke of a girl who used to visit Connolly on Sunday evenings when he was curate in Ballymore Eustace. Also, there was a Mrs. Fay who, it was alleged, "slept in his bedroom - drove about with him by day and by night". Another woman was stated to have been "frequently in his bedroom" and to have been seen kissing him there on one occasion. More serious was the charge that a woman, who had been in his service for four months, had left in March 1892 to procure an abortion. These charges were followed by other more general complaints of neglect of duty and "unpriestly conduct".⁷

This statement was considered by Walsh to be "of an exceptionally weighty character" and he responded by writing a very strong letter to the accused curate. "I find it impossible to allow you to continue even for a day in the discharge of your duties in the curacy of Sandyford", the archbishop wrote. He justified this on the grounds that during "the possibly prolonged investigation" which was now necessary, "it would be ruinous to the interests of religion in the parish" that Connolly should be allowed to remain there, unless he could prove to the archbishop that the allegations

⁵ J. Foley to Gillooly, Castlerea, 8 Oct 1893, EDA.

⁶ Unsigned letter to Walsh, 10 Jan [1893], DDA.

⁷ Statement of Bridget Martin, 19 Jan 1893, DDA.

were false. The statements he had received, Walsh said, outlined a course of conduct "of fearful and almost incredible depravity" and that, true or false, the allegations had become "a matter of common talk in the neighbourhood". For this reason alone, the archbishop argued, it was necessary that the curate be removed from the parish at once. Arrangements had been made for the temporary discharge of Connolly's duties and the curate was summoned to meet the vicar general and the archbishop to discuss the charges in detail. In a footnote, Walsh added that it was the first time he had had to write such a letter - "and God grant that it may be the last".⁸

However necessary the archbishop may have deemed it to remove Connolly immediately, he does not seem to have considered the damage to the curate's reputation that such a hasty removal before trial might cause. This was a point made by the parish priest, Canon James Leahy, who came to the defence of his curate. "In simple justice to Fr. Connolly", Leahy wrote, "I hasten to assure your Grace that far from any complaint concerning his conduct in the neighbourhood I have never heard his name mentioned but with respect and affection by every class of parishioners high and low". The P.P. added that Sandyford had never had a "more zealous priest or harder worker" and he appealed to Walsh that, before any action be taken, Leahy himself should be allowed to offer his testimony "that there cannot be any ground for such grave accusations".⁹

The formal inquiry which followed was carried out by William Lee, parish priest of Bray. He stated his intention of interviewing the witness, requesting "her certificate of marriage, her discharges and the address of a priest in Monaghan" from whom he was seeking a reference as to her character. When the interview took place, the witness stated that, for eight weeks before she was employed by Fr. Connolly, Mrs. Fay was continually in the house and was alone there, as there was no female servant. The Canon was absent from the house and, according to the witness, this afforded an opportunity "for frequent visits from Mrs. Fay without being observed". Then, the witness stated that a bed was always prepared for Mrs. Fay in another room but that it was never used as she either slept in Connolly's room or she went to it in the morning. On one occasion, it was said, the witness had gone to the house and on entering Fr. Connolly's bedroom without knocking, she saw him in bed with Mrs. Fay. When asked why she had not revealed this at the first interview, the witness replied that so many things were then spoken about that it had slipped her mind. Lee had a "long and varied conversation" with the witness and he observed that both she

⁸ William Walsh to Connolly, Archbishop's House, 24 Jan 1893, (copy), DDA.

⁹ J. Leahy to Walsh, Sandyford, 24 Jan 1893, DDA.

and Mrs. Martin were strangers in the area and little was known of their characters. He was sending on ten discharges to the archbishop, including one from Connolly.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the contents of the discharges are not available to us nor do we know what the outcome of the investigation and the archbishop's final decision were. Clearly, though, there was still some suspicion attaching to Connolly, as in 1895, he had not been restored to the curacy but was chaplain to an institution in Ranelagh.¹¹

The case of Dominick Noone, a priest of Elphin diocese in the early 1850's, does seem more clearcut. Noone, parish priest of Geevagh, was accused of co-habiting with a young woman and it does appear that he continued to live with her over a number of years despite the efforts of bishops and senior clergymen to force him to separate from her. In December 1855, the bishop, George Browne, wrote to Noone, in response to a letter from Noone, in which the P.P. professed obedience to the bishop in all matters concerning religion. Browne now proposed to put this profession of obedience to the test by issuing a "solemn mandate" ordering Noone to separate until the "solemn opinion of a learned disinterested person" had been obtained.¹²

It is clear from Browne's next letter that Noone's response was not as desired. In a short, sharp reply, Browne stated that he could not agree with Noone but that he did not have time to assign his reasons.¹³ This was followed immediately by a longer letter from the bishop, in which he repeated his earlier solemn mandate of immediate separation. There could not possibly be any scandal "except pharasaical", said Browne, as he advised Noone to amuse himself in the company of other priests "or in holy meditation or in spiritual exercises". In the meantime, Browne undertook to institute a formal investigation by summoning his informants to give evidence. "I am the sole judge as to the prudence of conceding an investigation or not", the bishop stated testily, "I can in such cases proceed *ex informata conscientia*". Browne further advised Noone not to talk publicly about the episcopal mandate, as any statement he might make would be open to misunderstanding. "I always wished that the act of separation should appear more to emanate from yourself than from me", the bishop commented and then concluded with a firm instruction: "Obey and do not write here again any letter of remonstrance as I cannot give you any reply different from this".¹⁴

¹⁰ W. M. Lee to Walsh, Bray, 3 Feb 1893, DDA.

¹¹ Irish Catholic Directory 1895.

¹² George J. P. Browne to Noone, Roscommon, 8 Dec 1855, (copy), EDA.

¹³ George J. P. Browne to Noone, Roscommon, 12 Dec 1855, (copy), EDA.

¹⁴ George J. P. Browne to Noone, Roscommon, 14 Dec 1855, (copy), EDA.

Matt Monaghan, one of the witnesses, began his evidence by denying that his report had been prompted in any way by a dispute with Noone while he was his curate. In his evidence, Monaghan stated that there was a rumour and a grave suspicion among the people about Noone's relationship with the woman. In Ballinafad, the woman was delivered of a child and Noone had removed her from his house a few days before her confinement. Monaghan said that the woman was married to a man from Ballintubber, who had gone to America. "I conceived that her dress and her manner at his table was calculated to cause me to suspect the very same thing which the people suspected" the curate testified circumspactly. Monaghan had been nine months in the parish before he made his report to the bishop and, in response to queries from the bishop, Monaghan stated that he was not the instigator of these reports. He added that he had not exaggerated because of his dispute with Noone about parish income.¹⁵ This evidence was corroborated by James O'Reilly, who was curate in Noone's parish of Geevagh in 1853. "This female used to be in such style as regards dress", O'Reilly stated, "and her long family being supported by Fr. Dominick without being related to him, that the people were not pleased and though they did not speak out plain, made use of insinuation that there was something wrong without stating any particular fact".¹⁶

When Laurence Gillooly succeeded Browne as bishop of Elphin, he was advised in the matter by diocesan secretary, Thomas Kilroe of Roscommon. Kilroe referred to Browne's instruction to Noone to separate from the woman, to which there was "a rejoinder of an extraordinary kind". He also informed Gillooly that Browne had intended to impose a suspension *ipso facto* on Noone. He had contented himself with a solemn mandate, but he had warned Noone that he would take more severe measures if his letter of 14 December were disregarded.¹⁷

That there was a close relationship between the parish priest and the woman is quite clear but whether there was any irregularity was a matter to be proved. Unlike problems with alcohol, where the proof was self-evident, so long as Noone refused to admit that there was anything irregular in the relationship, the onus of proof was on the authorities. Also, Dominick Noone was a parish priest and therefore, he could not be removed without notice and without adequate proof of wrongdoing. Whether his female companion remained in residence or not is not known, but Dominick Noone remained as parish priest of Geevagh until his death in February 1871.¹⁸

¹⁵ Transcript of interview with Monaghan, 20 Dec 1855, EDA.

¹⁶ Transcript of interview with James O'Reilly C.C., 20 Dec 1855, EDA.

¹⁷ Thomas Kilroe to Gillooly, Roscommon, 27 Sept 1856, EDA.

¹⁸ Archdeacon O'Rorke, **History of Sligo: Town and County**, (Sligo 1986 edition),ii, p.277.

A curate who found himself in a similar predicament was John Campbell of Armagh diocese. Campbell, a curate at Ballymacnab, was accused by Patrick McIver of having been caught in bed four times with McIver's sister in their father's house. McIver said that he had not spoken of it before because his sister was unmarried and he feared that, if this became public knowledge, she would never be married and would be "a burden" on him for his lifetime. McIver also alleged that Campbell had obtained a bond of £30 "fraudulently" from his father and that he was hoping to receive payment of this sum before disclosing "the dirty crime".¹⁹ This information, which came via a curate Patrick Lamb, was forwarded to Archbishop Dixon by Felix Slane, who queried the reasons offered for the delay in reporting the matter. "May God direct your Grace in dealing with such a painful matter" was Slane's wish to his archbishop.²⁰

Ten days later, Lamb wrote to Slane again, enclosing a formal statement from Patrick McIver repeating his allegation about Campbell being caught in bed with his sister, Mary, now deceased. McIver did not wish his family's character to be publicly exposed but he declared that he would do whatever was required to substantiate his charge.²¹ On forwarding this information to Dixon, Slane commented that the case was the strangest he had ever encountered and that it must be approached with great caution. "A man exposes the guilt and shame of his own sister, thereby seriously reflecting on the character of a priest with whom he has a dispute - the female dead, no reference can be made to her on the subject", Slane observed astutely, "All these things taken together really gives to the whole affair a very suspicious aspect". He thought it would be as well if the case could be prevented from going before a civil tribunal and he advised the archbishop to summon the parties before him. Slane himself offered to help with the investigation.²²

The archbishop referred the case to his other confidant, Michael Kieran, who identified the woman as one who had been previously accused by Campbell of having stolen money from his desk. Kieran agreed to conduct an investigation into the matter and to meet the accusing parties. Until this was done, Kieran thought that Campbell should not be informed of the charges against him. His reason for this was that, if the charge were true and if Campbell should hear of it beforehand, then, Kieran felt, "very powerful means would be employed to prevent the accuser coming forward". After the

¹⁹ Patrick Lamb to Slane, 20 Nov 1858, ArmDA.

²⁰ F. Slane to Dixon, Dungannon, 21 Nov 1858, ArmDA.

²¹ Patrick Lamb to Slane, 30 Nov 1858; statement of Patrick McIver, 29 Nov 1858, ArmDA.

²² F. Slane to Dixon, Dungannon, 1 Dec 1858, ArmDA.

investigation, Campbell would have time enough to disprove the truth of the charge, if he could.²³

Kieran interviewed Lamb, whom he described as a "sensible, conscientious man" and he spoke to Campbell, who confirmed that there was a servant maid in McIver's house at the time the alleged offences had taken place. Kieran said to Campbell that it would be a great point in his favour if this woman could be found to testify but Campbell pointed out that the case would be worse if she were to confirm McIver's allegations. There was a possibility that the woman might be found as her evidence would be "most important in the case", Kieran ended.²⁴ Since there is no further material available in the archives on the case, it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions.

Priests were discouraged from forming friendships with women and the question of familiarity with females was raised from time to time, usually by parish priests exercising vigilance over their curates. Richard Galvin, P.P. Rathdrum in Dublin diocese, was not at all happy with the activities and behaviour of two of his curates, Michael Curran and Daniel Lynch. The report about Curran had come from a former housekeeper who, in Galvin's opinion, was a person "not worthy of credit". The housekeeper alleged that she had seen a local teacher in Curran's bedroom at one o'clock in the morning. Galvin had already spoken to the teacher about her frequent visits to the curate's house and she had then ceased going there. The P.P. also stated that Curran, who had a drink problem, often interviewed people in his bedroom "in his most regular period" and he added that the housekeeper and the teacher had made no secret of their ill feeling towards one another.²⁵

As regards Daniel Lynch, the curate at Aughrim, Galvin was not so defensive. In June 1874, the P.P. wrote: "The hospitality at Aughrim, nearly always including young ladies, far and near who were sometimes weather-bound on the premises, was in my mind rather excessive". Galvin had been invited to the soirees but he had attended once and having observed "the character of it", he did not go there again. He stressed that Lynch did not have any problem with alcohol, adding the remark: "Of course driving young ladies at late hours might lead to suspicions particularly if followed as a constant practice". Galvin recommended, at this point, a warning from Archbishop Cullen rather than a "formidable investigation" which might lead to

²³ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 7 Dec 1858, ArmDA.

²⁴ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 8 Jan 1859, ArmDA.

²⁵ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 25 Oct 1873, DDA.

scandal. Galvin was anxious that Lynch should not discover the identity of the archbishop's informant, as Lynch was under the impression that he had been reported by the archdeacon.²⁶

In his next letter, however, Galvin was requesting that Lynch be removed immediately. Apart from the complaints about his leaving debts unpaid, Lynch's behaviour had not improved in the P.P.'s opinion - "A drive to Dublin, or 30 or 40 miles a day or night in his croydon he thinks nothing of, if he can befriend a few girls by his side on the way". The curate's fondness for female company the P.P. described as "unchanging and unchanged". "These poor things have said to me he is quite a father to them", Galvin reported, adding that Lynch preferred to have breakfast at the house of a widow who had two young daughters than with the other priests in the sacristy. According to Galvin, this widow had been responsible for the downfall of two previous curates, both of whom had drink problems. "Whenever he can he puts up at night with the C.C. here where there is a lady betimes serenaded by day and by night in the croydon", said Galvin and he remarked that the people were of the opinion that the curate was "crakt". He requested Lynch's removal and he sought, as a replacement, "some young safe reliable ascetic, fresh from the anvil if possible...".²⁷

There followed a series of letters of complaint. Lynch was still running up debts and settling down at night away from home, wherever there were girls to be serenaded. "Of course", Galvin commented, "those of any standing have withdrawn and only those of minor condition who deem themselves embellished by such fatherly kindness continue to patronize him". He related how Lynch had stayed for two nights with the curate and his sister at Rathdrum and how he had driven fourteen miles to serenade on his croydon "a delicate attractive Miss McGrath from Imail often serenaded early and late and entertained with her sister whilst on a visit at their aunts in this parish recently". Galvin complained again about the daughters of "the publican widow at Greenan" who were similarly entertained and driven about. He added that Lynch was still spending recklessly and then said: "The idea of settling down on Saturdays and eves of festivals for confessions and after six in his own house some evenings *for men only* is out of the question". The archdeacon was of the opinion that Lynch did not recognise the distinction "as to men only" and Galvin concluded now that warnings or threats were of no avail.²⁸ Within a week of this letter arriving at archbishop's house, Lynch had been interviewed by Cullen, dismissed and replaced as curate at Aughrim.²⁹

²⁶ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 13 June 1874, DDA.

²⁷ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 1 Sept 1874, DDA.

²⁸ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Avonpark, Rathdrum, 3 Sept 1874, DDA.

²⁹ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Avonpark, Rathdrum, 9 Sept 1874, DDA.

A publican widow and her daughters were also the objects of the parish priest's concern at Drumcong, Carrick-on-Shannon, in Ardagh diocese. This time the complaint was about the conduct of a former priest of the parish, Bernard Geraghty, and the complaint was made by the incoming P.P., Hugh Brennan. According to Brennan, Geraghty frequently called to the public house in Drumcong and on one occasion at least had spent the night there. Brennan was not imputing any fault to Geraghty, except that it showed "a want of sense" and it gave an opportunity to "some censorious people who spare nobody and suspect everything with even a shadow of reason found". The problem, said Brennan, was that in this house lived a widow and her three daughters - "*in illa domo tres sunt puellae et eorum mater - vidua*" - and the house was frequently visited by Geraghty when he was ministering there.³⁰

Imagine Brennan's chagrin, then, when his curate, Mat. Conifrey, announced that he had taken lodgings in the very same public house. Conifrey's stated reason was that the curate's official residence was too damp and a danger to his health. Brennan felt that the widow did not like to refuse lodgings to Conifrey because he was a priest but she had told the curate that she was forbidden to keep lodgers in accordance with an instruction in her late husband's will. "The girls in the house would be glad he would stop there", Brennan remarked, "in order I suppose that they would be the companions of a priest as some of them were before. These girls rule the house and are not at all obedient to their mother and the latter told me they insisted on her leaving her own room and make way for the priest and obliged her to sleep in a crowded room with others". Brennan was of the opinion that Conifrey was disappointed that he had not been appointed to Cloone parish. The anxious P.P. reminded the bishop of his previous correspondence in which he had spoken of Geraghty's visits to the house, otherwise he would not have entertained the idea of any priest staying there.³¹ The incident sparked an ongoing dispute between Conifrey and the bishop, with Conifrey offering evidence of his poor health and steadfastly refusing to move to the curate's residence.³²

Familiarity with women was also the charge brought against James Dempsey, a priest of Dublin diocese and it led to his transfer to Newtownmountkennedy. Dempsey, however, protested his innocence in the most vigorous fashion, referring to the interview with Walsh when the archbishop had indicated that any statement from

³⁰ H. Brennan P.P. to Woodlock, Drumcong, Carrick-on-Shannon, 23 Sept [no year], ArdDA.

³¹ Hugh Brennan P.P. to Woodlock, Drumcong, 17 Oct 1885, ArdDA.

³² Letters of Conifrey to Woodlock, 12, 21, 29 Oct 1885, ArdDA.

Dempsey rebutting the charge would serve no purpose. "It was in fact made abundantly clear to me", the aggrieved curate wrote, "that I had been sent for only to hear a hinted charge and to receive a sentence that had already been decreed: it being at the same time clearly conveyed that there was no desire to hear denial or defence, because it was assumed there could be place for neither". As regards the charges against him, Dempsey was indignant that no specific allegations had been made but "only a sickening but most vague accusation was advanced, in terms so general that even if there had been every disposition to hear a reply, it would have been perfectly impossible to make it effective". The reason stated for Dempsey's removal from Baldoyle was "certain imprudence, grave imprudence in female society". The indignant Dempsey repudiated the charge absolutely, declaring that he had examined his conscience but, except perhaps for a certain indecorum or thoughtlessness, he could think of no occasion when he had been guilty of any conduct "deserving such dramatic punishment". "I defy any man or woman to make any truthful charge or the shadow of any truthful charge against me", Dempsey declared and he called for a proper investigation, where he could confront his accusers face to face. While Dempsey was committed to doing his duty in his new position, at the same time he could not conceal his disappointment at what had been a severe blow, not only to himself but to those whose good opinion he valued.³³

This strong and reasoned argument from Dempsey seems only to have had the effect of angering the archbishop, as, in his next letter, the curate excused himself by saying that he had written in a state "of intense suffering". He had hoped that it might have been read by Walsh "if not with sympathy, at least with much allowance for deeply moved feeling". He had intended only to protest his innocence and to state his grievance. "If my letter was anything more than this", he continued, "it was so, not only beside but against my intention and I am truly and deeply sorry for it". Dempsey then went on to say that, since no direct defence was open to him, he would rely on his future conduct "to supply a presumption amounting to proof of past innocence". He felt, too, that his poor health would militate against him in his new post at Newtownmountkennedy.³⁴

This incident serves to point up again the helpless situation of a curate accused and found guilty without any serious evidence being advanced or, at least, made known to him. It does appear as if the archbishop had acted hastily without any consultation with the accused. Furthermore, Walsh's response to the earnest and articulate plea

³³ James J. Dempsey C.C. to Walsh, Newtown Mount Kennedy, 4 August 1894, DDA.

³⁴ James J. Dempsey C.C. to Walsh, Newtown Mount Kennedy, 7 Oct 1894, DDA.

from the accused was to express annoyance rather than attempt to address the main point of the letter - a call for some form of due process and an opportunity to answer the vague allegations made against the curate. In these cases, Walsh does seem to have acted once the allegations were made and for curates certainly, it does appear that it was required of them that they be at all times above suspicion.

It is difficult to explain why, in a case like Dempsey's, Walsh was so reluctant to investigate the charges and, at least, afford the accused the opportunity of defending himself. The equity and the advisability of such an investigation is borne out in the case of Charles O'Brien, a curate at Moneymore in the Armagh diocese. About two years before O'Brien left Moneymore, a woman in the neighbourhood became pregnant. She declined to say by whom and rumour had it that Charles O'Brien was the person responsible. O'Brien's brother, Michael, also a priest, insisted on the matter being investigated. The woman was questioned and she made a solemn declaration, clearing Charles O'Brien of any implication whatever. When the evidence was presented to the archbishop, the curate was acquitted of all guilt. Felix Slane, who was present at the investigation, believed that O'Brien's reputation did not suffer and that, in fact, he was held in greater esteem among the clergy afterwards.³⁵

The statutes were specific on the requirements for the post of priest's housekeeper and the job description precluded women who were young and attractive. As we have seen in the case of Dominick Noone in Elphin, females who did not qualify as being older and plainer did not find approval with superiors. In Armagh, the relationship of Hugh Murphy, P.P. Beragh, with his housekeeper came under suspicion and he was called to account by Joseph Dixon, the archbishop. In his response, Murphy denied that the woman, who had been his servant, was still doing his washing in his house or that she had been in the house at a late hour. He admitted that she had called for his washing in the daytime but she had not called for the previous five weeks. Murphy then went into the most excruciating detail about the route this woman had taken from his house - not "the circuitous route" she was alleged to have taken. He ended by pointing out to Dixon that, if he were to be removed from the parish, his reputation would be seriously damaged, his enemies would be triumphant and a "bad precedent" would be established in the parish.³⁶

A more serious charge was levelled against Anthony Malone, curate at Termon, also in Armagh. Slane, who was requested to carry out the investigation, reported that

³⁵ F. Slane to Dixon, Dungannon, 21 Dec 1855, ArmDA.

³⁶ Hugh Murphy to Dixon, Jenkinstown, 28 July 1863, ArmDA.

Malone's housekeeper was pregnant while residing in the house, that she had left and was now residing in the neighbourhood of Armagh. Dixon was sufficiently alarmed to withdraw faculties from Malone, who denied any "complicity in the female's guilt". Slane commented: "This may be true and in charity I hope it is". Malone was on his way to meet Dixon and he had a declaration from the woman about the father of her child. Under these circumstances, Slane felt that it was useless to try and establish what the feelings of the people were. "One sensible and conscientious person" said that the people would regret anything that could injure a priest but that they were "greatly scandalized at the circumstance".³⁷ Canon Vincent informed Slane that the woman was prepared to answer any questions the archbishop might care to ask. Slane was not impressed and he commented that it was "a most painful, troublesome case all through" and that he did not know what to recommend.³⁸

Michael Kieran, who succeeded Dixon as archbishop of Armagh, had a similar case to deal with in 1868. He granted permission to absolve the guilty cleric but only on receiving a solemn promise that the housekeeper would be removed within three months. "I do not see what scandal can be given by an event which is occurring every day, the removal of a priest's housekeeper", Kieran remarked, arguing that her removal could not cause any surprise if there were no suspicions. Conversely, if there were any suspicions, then her removal would not put an end to them. He feared that, unless the housekeeper were removed, there would be a "relapse" and "the circumstance of the sin having originated in drink does not lessen but increase my fears". Kieran was perturbed, too, about reports from two people that a curate was in the habit of going to dances "and joining in the dance and paying the fiddler for the whole party". "Can it be possible", asked the irate archbishop, "that such an outrage on public decency could have occurred within three miles of Drogheda without coming to your knowledge".³⁹

Strange indeed and difficult to fathom is the case of John Madden, parish priest of Killymard in Raphoe diocese. A woman in the parish became pregnant and John Madden's name was associated with her.⁴⁰ Following a statement given by a woman at Killymard, Madden sought an investigation.⁴¹ The bishop decided to suspend John Madden *ex informata conscientia*⁴² and, while Madden acknowledged receipt of the letter announcing the suspension, he did not acknowledge guilt. Protesting that his

³⁷ F. Slane to Dixon, Dungannon, 7 April 1858, ArmDA.

³⁸ F. Slane to Dixon, Dungannon, 24 May 1858, ArmDA.

³⁹ Letter of M. Kieran, Forthill, 20 April 1868, (copy), ArmDA.

⁴⁰ James Walker to McDevitt, Donegal, 3 July 1874, RDA.

⁴¹ John Feely to McDevitt, 17 July 1874, RDA.

⁴² James McDevitt to John Madden, Letterkenny, 31 July 1874 (copy), RDA.

case did not deserve such a sentence, he nevertheless prepared to leave the diocese.⁴³ The exiled priest was the owner of a farm and the bishop was anxious that ownership of the farm should be transferred to the diocese before his departure.⁴⁴ The matter of Madden's pension remained to be settled⁴⁵ and he was promised the proceeds of an auction of furniture and crops.⁴⁶

The next correspondence from John Madden comes from an address in Philadelphia, U.S.A. in June 1875. He raises the question of the amount of his pension, which has still not been settled. He is staying with his sister, who is ill and the funds he brought with him are now almost exhausted. He is hopeful of bringing his mother and sisters to Philadelphia and he requests £150 from the bishop to start up a business. Madden then speaks of the difficulty of finding suitable employment. "I cannot bear to teach where it is known what I am because it is so humiliating", he writes. Because of the difficulty he is having in finding employment, Madden is refusing to resign the parish of Killymard unconditionally.⁴⁷ By November, Madden's situation had still not improved and the difficulties he faced increased rather than diminished. He was again making enquiries about his pension and he complained that a cousin of a Donegal priest had slandered him.⁴⁸

The amount of the pension allocated to Madden was £25 per annum and he protested that this was not at all adequate for his purposes and that a sum of £100 would be a much more realistic figure.⁴⁹ From this point on, John Madden's letters are concerned almost entirely with two points - the matter of his pension and his insistent pleading that he is innocent of the charges laid against him.

In December 1876, Madden expressed a wish to enter a monastery in Kentucky and he was accepted conditionally.⁵⁰ The next series of letters from Madden is written from the Abbey of Gethsemany in Nelson, Kentucky and they repeat the same two themes - the inadequacy of the financial allowance and his innocence.⁵¹ In June 1877, the Abbot wrote to the bishop putting Madden's case. If his confessor would allow

⁴³ James McDevitt, Memo on the Madden case, 2 Aug 1874, RDA.

⁴⁴ P. Kelly to McDevitt, Donegal, 8 Aug 1874, RDA.

⁴⁵ John Madden to McDevitt, Killymard, 10 Aug 1874, RDA.

⁴⁶ Charles McGlynn to McDevitt, Donegal, 18 Aug 1874, RDA.

⁴⁷ John Madden to McDevitt, 1636 Barker St., Philadelphia, 7 June 1875, RDA.

⁴⁸ John Madden to McDevitt, Philadelphia, 9 Nov 1875, RDA.

⁴⁹ John Madden to McDevitt, Philadelphia, 27 Dec 1875, RDA.

⁵⁰ B.M. Benedict, Abbot, to McDevitt, Abbey of Gethsemany, Kentucky, U.S.A., 18 Dec 1876, RDA.

⁵¹ John Madden to McDevitt, Abbey of Gethsemany, Nelson, Kentucky, U.S.A., 5 March 1877; also undated letter.

him to say mass, the Abbot had no objection. He supported Madden in his claim that £25 per annum was not enough to maintain him and finally, he stated that Madden wanted a hearing of his case.⁵² Madden was given permission to say mass and it would appear that the matter of the pension was satisfactorily resolved as Madden resigned the parish of Killymard on 22 February 1878.⁵³

It would be interesting to discover if, in fact, John Madden persevered as a monk at the Abbey of Gethsemany in Kentucky, U.S.A. as he repeatedly claims to have been harshly treated. From the available evidence, it is very difficult to make a judgement on the rights and wrongs of the case but it does appear that, if he were not indeed guilty of the alleged crime, then he was being punished for over familiarity with a woman. Again, the implication here is that a priest, like Caesar's wife, should be above suspicion. There was an investigation but in a case as serious as this, a formal ecclesiastical trial, such as Madden requested, would surely have been more just. The suspension imposed on the accused priest was *ex informata conscientia*, which meant that it was at the discretion of the bishop, who passed sentence on the evidence made available to him. Once the sentence had been imposed, there was very little option open to Madden except to leave the priesthood or leave the country. That he wished to remain a priest is evident from his decision to enter a monastery in the U.S. and his persistent assertion of his innocence does seem, at least, to have merited a formal hearing of his case.

Occasionally, there were complaints from abroad about clergymen, who were either on loan to foreign dioceses or on holiday. Paul Cullen received a complaint about a Dublin priest on the mission in Lanarkshire in Scotland, who had visited a brothel. While there, he had given as payment a silver snuffbox, which was at once offered in a pawn office. A detective had observed this and the woman who presented it agreed to identify the owner of the snuffbox. This woman was working as a maid at the brothel and as a result, the offending clergyman was brought before the local magistrate, who was reluctant to believe that a clergyman would be found in such a place.⁵⁴

Likewise, Edward McCabe had a letter from the bishop of Birmingham, William Bernard, about the adventures of one Arthur Byrne, a priest journeying from

⁵² B.M. Benedict, Abbot, to McDevitt, Abbey of Gethsemany, Nelson Co., Kentucky, U.S.A., 28 June 1878, RDA.

⁵³ John Madden to McDevitt, Gethsemany Abbey, Nelson, Kentucky, U.S.A., 18 July 1877; 22 Feb 1878, RDA.

⁵⁴ W. Murphy to Cullen, Marlborough St., 24 Aug [1867], DDA.

Rome to Dublin. Enclosed was a newspaper cutting headed "A Priest in Trouble", which related how Byrne, in a drunken state, was seen walking about in the company of two women said to be prostitutes. He had fallen down in the street and was arrested. He was ordered to pay a fine of 10s.6d.⁵⁵

By far the most serious charge in this category was that faced by J. A. Nolan, a Dublin priest on holiday in Paris in 1881. On 6 September, Edward McCabe received from Nolan a letter headed Prison de Mazas, Paris. Nolan told how he had gone into a bathing establishment to take a bath and, not having a bathing suit, he appeared nude. He was accused of violating public decency, because, he said, there was a female present in the building at the time and he was unaware of her presence. Not having any knowledge of French, he found his case becoming more complicated and a serious charge of immorality was preferred against him. He had taken the trip abroad on the advice of his doctor and he had departed without a *celebret*, or official letter of introduction. He was to appear before the courts again and he was appealing to McCabe to communicate with the British ambassador in Paris to obtain his release. "I am partly afraid that if I am kept much longer, I will never return alive", wrote the unfortunate Nolan. He had employed a lawyer and he had written to Patrick Hickey, parish priest of Dundrum for a letter of identification. He had also had a visit from an official of the British embassy, who had told him that the French law was "very tedious" in these matters and that, since he had been accused, he would have to go to trial.⁵⁶

This was followed shortly by a telegram from a Monsignor Rogerson, informing McCabe that Nolan had been condemned to six months imprisonment.⁵⁷ The next day, there was a telegram from parish priest Patrick Hickey, who had been dispatched to Paris, confirming the news of the prison sentence.⁵⁸

Hickey then wrote a letter giving further details. He was very concerned about Nolan's state of health, describing him as "a sad sight" and saying that he had changed so much that Hickey could scarcely recognise him. Nolan had been brought to court with "several degraded prisoners" and Hickey had not been allowed to speak with him before the trial. It emerges from this letter of Hickey's that the charge was not as Nolan had described it but was a charge of soliciting a young boy. Hickey described the boy

⁵⁵ William Bernard to McCabe, St. Mary's College, Oscott, 4 Feb 1882, DDA.

⁵⁶ J. A. Nolan to McCabe, 6 Sept 1881, DDA.

⁵⁷ Telegram, Monsignor Rogerson, Prelat de la Maison de la Saintete, 19 Rue de Chaillot [Paris], 10 Sept 1881, DDA.

⁵⁸ Telegram, Patrick Hickey, Paris, 10 Sept 1881, DDA.

as about ten years of age and says that he gave his evidence with "diabolical coolness". Monsignor Rogerson had done everything in his power to defend Nolan and had advised him. There was a right to appeal open to them but, Hickey reported, their advocate had shrugged his shoulders and he did not seem very hopeful that the appeal would be successful. Hickey cast doubt on the boy's evidence by saying that he knew no English and Nolan could not speak French. The Monsignor, too, thought that an appeal would not be successful. The British embassy had paid the expenses of the defence to this point. Finally, Hickey referred to the letter of testimony in Nolan's favour from McCabe but, he said, "all did not avail against the strong anticlerical feeling of Paris".⁵⁹

There followed a letter from the British Embassy in Paris, stating that every effort had been made and that Nolan had been defended by a very able French advocate. The official promised to seek to have the sentence mitigated but he was obliged to add that it was very doubtful if he could succeed in this. "In the meantime", the letter ended, "I have asked the Prison Authorities to allow him to provide himself with some addition to the regulation diet".⁶⁰ Judging from this, then, it would appear that Nolan was obliged to serve his sentence in full. Nolan's name is absent from the list of Dublin curates in the Catholic Directory for a couple of years but there is a John Nolan named as curate in Kilbride parish in 1885.⁶¹

The act of soliciting in the confessional was considered a very grave offence and was deemed a reserved sin, for which only the bishop of the diocese could grant absolution. There is only one such accusation on record and it comes from a woman in Capetown, who accused a priest of soliciting her on several occasions to "commit sins against the sixth commandment". She instanced a specific occasion when she was a guest with the O'Farrells of Longford. She understood from the priest that he was stationed at Blackrock, Co. Dublin and following the meeting, she had several letters from the priest.⁶² The complainant's letter is somewhat confused but it must be said that it was unusual for a letter of this nature in that it was signed.

In general, then, the evidence suggests that the majority of priests accepted the strictures laid down in the laws relating to celibacy and were faithful to them. The French commentator, Paschal Grousset, had no difficulty in believing that the Irish clergy led lives "of exemplary purity" because he felt that purity was a marked

⁵⁹ P. Hickey to McCabe, Hotel Meurice, 228 Rue de Rivoli, Paris, Friday evening 1881, DDA.

⁶⁰ Lyons to McCabe, British Embassy, Paris, 7 Oct 1881, DDA.

⁶¹ Irish Catholic Directory 1882, 1883, 1885.

⁶² Edith Sands to Walsh, Roland St., Capetown, 28 March 1887, DDA.

characteristic of the race and because their faith seemed to him "as simple as that of the Breton priests". Some exceptions had been pointed out to him but he concludes that the Irish priests do not have "the vices of the Italian or Spanish priest". The Irish priest Grousset describes as "a gormandizer", and then adds: "but he is chaste - perhaps for the very reason that he is so devoted to the pleasures of the table".⁶³ Over the period in question, the Dublin diocesan archives contain the most complete and detailed collection of letters and documents and here complaints about breaches of the celibacy regulations are rare indeed and where serious charges are made, very few are successfully substantiated.

The evidence shows that the statutes governing the conduct of priests in their relations with women were strictly observed. The implications of these regulations and the attitudes of priests towards women which they fostered remain a matter of speculation. In this regard, one must note the observations such as those of the priest character in George Moore's **The Lake**, when he remarks that at Maynooth "the tradition was to despise women".⁶⁴ Or William Patrick O'Ryan, who wrote in **The Plough and the Cross**: "Not surprisingly to a liberal Catholic, it is partly through Maynooth, and the ideas it has spread [that] the Irish popular mind has become poisoned and ashamed on the subject of love and marriage".⁶⁵ Paul Blanchard, in **Freedom and Catholic Power**, refers to the sexual code, "twisted and bizarre", which was not "implausibly associated with compensation for thwarted instincts and suppressed desires".⁶⁶ It may be that this compensation for thwarted instincts and suppressed desires contributed to what was a more serious problem of discipline for the nineteenth century clergy, overindulgence in alcohol.

⁶³ Grousset, *op. cit.*, pp. 220-1.

⁶⁴ quoted in K. H. Connell, **Irish Peasant Society**, (Oxford 1968), p. 127.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 129.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 136.

Chapter Nine

Problems of Clerical Wealth

Catholic secular priests in the latter half of the nineteenth had become accustomed to handling large sums of money. Apart from the usual round of collections throughout the year, there were special collections for various charitable causes. In addition, their central role in the building and funding of churches, schools and presbyteries meant that they had to take responsibility for managing the finances involved. For priests lacking in the necessary skills, this could lead to considerable anxiety and for clerics who were avaricious by nature, there was the opportunity to acquire substantial assets and to enhance personal wealth.

The question of clerical avarice is a complex one and one of the difficulties is the very definition of the term and the context in which it is used. There were, in the first instance, clergymen to whom the epithet 'avaricious' certainly applies. They include priests like James Ryan, bishop of Limerick, whose estate was valued at £35,000 in 1864; Peter Daly, who used personal and ecclesiastical income to add to his considerable holdings in Galway city; Patrick Hickey, parish priest of Doon, a relative of James Ryan's, who shared with the bishop the capacity to accumulate wealth and property and John D. McGarvey of Milford, Co. Donegal, who succeeded in amassing a huge personal fortune in a time and place where there was real hardship and deprivation. These and other clerics who singlemindedly set about increasing their own personal wealth must surely have pleaded guilty to the charge of avarice. But the problem does not end there, as questions must be asked of those who, like McGarvey, built singularly sumptuous residences and enjoyed a lifestyle which was in sharp contrast with the lifestyle of those among whom they lived. This is especially true in the situation where the standard of living enjoyed by such clerics resulted from the offerings collected from those same people.

The very act of collecting money and the manner in which it was carried out could also create the suspicion of avarice. As the second half of the nineteenth century wore on, it could well be called the Age of the Collection. Apart from the standard collections for the support of the clergy, there were collections for schools, churches and parish houses, collections for Rome, collections for charitable institutions and seminaries, collections for cathedrals and the foreign missions. While it does appear that the Catholic population gave with a will, the robust and over-enthusiastic style of

some clerical collectors gave rise to resentment. In his book, **Ireland under Coercion**, published in 1888, William H. Hurlbert refers to the custom in some parishes of personal collections of dues by priests. In many parishes, he claims, priests stood by the church door or walked about the church with an open plate on which the people were expected to place their offerings. He also states that there were parishes where the priest sat by a table near the church door, taking the offerings from parishioners as they passed and commenting freely on the amount of the offerings.¹ It is difficult to establish exactly just how widespread this method of collecting was but, undoubtedly, it was the custom in a number of parishes and it was open to abuse by avaricious individuals. Another commentator, Paschal Grousset, describes the reading of the lists in a country church and records some of the priest's comments. "Daniel MacCarthy, four shillings and six-pence.... That's not much for a farmer who keeps three cows and sold two calves this year. I will hope for him that he only meant that as a preliminary gift.." or "Harriet O'Connor, one shilling and nine-pence. I will be bound she liked buying a new bonnet better than doing her duty. But I am afraid that at the Day of Judgment she won't find it such a good investment...".²

There were complaints from parishioners and fairly typical of this kind of complaint is that coming from a parishioner signing himself Patt Smyth in Mullahoran parish in Ardagh diocese. Writing about the introduction of a new system of collecting which had been introduced into the parish, Smyth said that the old system whereby "the wealthy part of the parishioners" went to the altar and placed their offerings there "according to their ability at Easter and Christmas" was preferable to the new system where collectors called at each house and returned to the P.P. with a list of all who had paid. The P.P. then read from the altar the names of those who had paid and those who had not. This new system Smyth described as "the separating system" because it separated the goats from the sheep - "the Henry tribe from the Fleecy tribe". The lists were read out "with spurious comments on the poorer part" and this, said Smyth, led to a drop in attendance at church after Christmas and Easter as "very few of the goats will go into the chapel to hear their poverty and faults exposed to the whole congregation." He continued: "They hear mass without any composure of mind, often hearing their destitution spelled out".³

The unfortunate practice in some dioceses of reading publicly lists of defaulters also gave rise to resentment and, in particular, the insensitive comments of some priests

¹ Hurlbert, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 136-7.

² Grousset, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-5.

³ Patt Smyth, Clonevade, Parish of Mullahoran, 22 Sept 1853, ArdDA.

caused anger and embarrassment and further added to the perception of the 'priest always looking for money'. Many of the complaints about altar denunciations had to do with collections of parish dues and the refusal or the inability to pay on the part of some parishioners. In Cashel diocese, a number of priests were reported to the archbishop for alleged use of abusive language. Thomas Duggan, parish priest of Murroe, wrote to Archbishop Leahy explaining the difficulties he was having in collecting dues from all his parishioners. He informed Leahy that there were only a few defaulters and these people wished to harm him. He had read their names from the altar and he had also denounced those who had been absent from a recent mission.⁴

One parishioner who was denounced from the altar by Duggan was James Heffernan, a local doctor, but Heffernan was not prepared to suffer in silence. He wrote a letter of complaint to Archbishop Leahy and when he received no reply, he sent a second letter in which he said that he interpreted Leahy's silence and refusal to grant him an audience as condoning Duggan's conduct. The doctor then stated that he understood that public denunciation was prohibited, particularly when it referred to collecting dues. He threatened to bring the case to the notice of Paul Cullen, archbishop of Dublin, and, if necessary, to make it public in the press. He stressed that he was not complaining of Duggan's conduct through ill feeling but simply "to right myself with the congregation before whom I was so wantonly and grossly insulted". Heffernan added that, in his opinion, the attack on him was motivated by the fact that he had opposed the P.P.'s choice of doctor as his successor at the local dispensary.⁵

Other Cashel priests given to colourful language from the pulpit were Michael Fitzgerald and Philip Cleary. Fitzgerald was accused of attacking a Mrs. O'Brien for non payment of dues. Daniel Lanigan, parish priest of Murroe, who was sent to investigate the charge, reported that Fitzgerald publicly denounced the O'Briens as having money to drink with but no money for the priests. Fitzgerald was rebuked for using unpriestly language, having referred to Mrs. O'Brien publicly as "crooked neck".⁶ Cleary, parish priest of Cappamore, was accused of having denounced a parishioner called Patrick Ryan. According to Ryan, Cleary had increased the station dues from 5s. and, when Ryan offered the P.P. 7s.6d., Cleary refused to take it, saying that it was not sufficient. Ryan put the money in his pocket and walked away and then, on the following Sunday, said Ryan, the P.P. "came out most ungentlemanly and denounced me by name from the altar and made the most uncharitable and

⁴ Thomas Duggan to Leahy, Abington, Murroe, 9 Dec [no year], CDA.

⁵ James Heffernan to Leahy, Ballyvoren, 29 Jan 1872, CDA.

⁶ Daniel K. Lanigan to Leahy, Abington, Murroe, 22 Dec 1873, CDA.

unchristianlike observations on me and my family". Ryan had again offered the sum of 7s.6d. at Easter and, when it was refused again, he took it back, saying that he would make no further offerings. The P.P. openly denounced him, Ryan alleged, referring to him as a "publick robber". In Ryan's view, this was an offence against the law of the land and of the church and he was confident that, if he were forced to it, he could prove the charge in a court of law. The P.P. was now threatening to denounce him again on the following Sunday "in very remarkable terms" and consequently, Ryan was asking the archbishop to intervene.⁷

In his response to the charge, Philip Cleary did not deny speaking about Ryan but he argued that there was nothing he had said which could be taken as denunciation. Cleary then explained that, when he had moved the station masses from the houses to the church, he had raised the fee from 5s. and he expected the wealthier farmers to pay 10s. A number of farmers had complied with this demand while Ryan, whom Cleary described as "one of the most wealthy farmers", would contribute only 7s.6d. In Cleary's opinion, Ryan was depriving him of his dues and he felt that Ryan's manner towards him looked like robbing him of his dues. This, said the indignant parish priest, was "the hardest thing I said of him and said only in the presence of a few families". Cleary then pointed out that Ryan was connected by marriage with the Connells of Doon, who were "notorious for opposing priests" and the P.P. felt sure that Ryan was being encouraged by these family connections to write to the archbishop.⁸

There were similar complaints in Armagh diocese and Michael Kieran wrote to Dixon about Thomas Corrigan, P.P. Kilsaran. Kieran said that he had it on good authority that Corrigan had attacked a Mrs. Brennan from the altar in "very violent language" because he was dissatisfied with her contribution to the collection for the pope. This, in Kieran's view, merited a "severe reproof".⁹

In Ardagh diocese, in 1869, there were several complaints about the behaviour of James Lee of Tissarne. In one letter, Lee was accused of having "disposed of a very large quantity of oats... which he got through fear and coercion from the poor people".¹⁰ In another letter, sent by a Michael Egan, Lee was said to have publicly abused Egan from the altar at the mass on New Year's Day. Egan complained that, when reading out the list of offerings, Lee commented that Egan had given only 5s. but

⁷ Patrick Ryan to Leahy, Killuragh, Pallasgreen, 25 Feb 1874, CDA.

⁸ P. Cleary to Leahy, Cappamore, Co. Limerick, 16 March 1874, CDA.

⁹ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 12 July 1860, ArmDA.

¹⁰ Anonymous letter to McCabe, Tissarne, 2 Jan 1869, ArdDA.

that he gave 15s. "in Connaught". "He's a gentleman in Connaught and only a beggar here," the priest commented, "He has a brother a good priest but he is only a beggar himself".¹¹

Financial Irregularities

Given that so many priests were involved in the task of raising and managing large sums of money, it was inevitable that there should have been casualties and that some of them should find themselves in serious financial difficulties. But it should be stated that the number of instances recorded of priests involved in embezzlement or grave misuse of parish and ecclesiastical funds is quite small. Where they did occur, financial problems for the clergy arose from a variety of sources but the principal causes were firstly, a lack of management skills; secondly, problems with alcohol and consequent negligence in meeting debts and lastly, what can only be described as avarice - an obsessive interest in amassing large personal fortunes. There are some few cases of clerics who shamelessly abused their position of privilege to increase their personal fortunes and to finance their excessive standard of living.

Into this latter category comes Daniel Lynch, a curate at Aughrim, Co. Wicklow in the early 1870's, whose fondness for female company has already been referred to. Lynch had come to Dublin diocese from the American mission, complete with glowing testimonials from the president of the Irish College, Rome.¹² In September 1874, Richard Galvin, P.P. of Rathdrum, reported to Paul Cullen that Lynch was running up severe debts in the area. The people had made a collection to fit him out for the mission, said Galvin, and now Lynch had started a raffle to build outhouses. Lynch had been running heavy bills and borrowing extensively wherever he could. Galvin claimed that Lynch came from a wealthy family and that his creditors were counting on his "grand furniture" to pay them, as all were agreed that "he must soon come to a crash". Indeed, added Galvin, some had already seen his name in the "black list", a printed list of defaulting debtors. "I am sure it will be impossible for him to make ends meet he lives so extravagantly", Galvin concluded.¹³

Cullen responded to this by removing Lynch from Rathdrum and his departure brought a flood of demand notices, bills and complaints.¹⁴ A man called Byrne, who

¹¹ Michael Egan to McCabe, Hartown, 4 Jan 1869, ArdDA.

¹² Richard Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 16 Sept 1874, DDA.

¹³ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Avonpark, Rathdrum, 1 Sept 1874, DDA.

¹⁴ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Avonpark, Rathdrum, 9 Sept 1874, DDA.

owned a furniture store in Henry St., stated that Lynch owed him over £120 and this did not include the "costly piano". Another Byrne, this time a coachbuilder at Wicklow, was claiming £28 for a croydon and harness. Local creditors were also looking for their money. Two butchers sent their bills to Galvin, who promptly returned them, as he did with three small bills amounting to about £7. There was a bill for car hire from a J. Cowley of Rathdrum and James Phelan, a grocer in Aughrim, was owed £40. The Byrnes were badly affected and Mrs. Byrne, a publican, who, said Galvin, "appeared to know all his [Lynch's] movements" would not say exactly how much she was owed but she admitted that Lynch had "pinched her sorely". She expected to buy the piano. Lynch had been on friendly terms with a clerical student called Dunne from Clonliffe College and, according to Galvin, Lynch had made Mrs. Dunne, the student's mother, "bleed profusely as she was a great crone of his". Likewise, a Miss Butler, who, with her niece, had accompanied Lynch on a trip to the continent. Then there was a Mrs. Fogarty, who reported that her husband, a rich mill owner, had been approached by Lynch for a loan of £20. Fogarty had refused but he had often given the curate money "to equip his reverence for the mission". "On reflection", Galvin wrote, "I cannot see what good can come from a critical inquiry into his exact debts when he has not wherewith to meet them". It would appear that Lynch had brought his borrowing habits with him from America, as Galvin had seen a document claiming £200 from a dressmaker in Newfoundland who had come to Ireland to sue the defaulting curate. Lynch's story was that the dressmaker had been persuaded to prosecute by some young priest "out of jealousy". Galvin then stated: "The less inquiry there is, and the more quietly the business is managed, the better for all concerned. The people would be most reluctant to have anything to say to it and would undergo a great deal sooner than involve a cleric".¹⁵

As if this were not sufficient, there was a serious charge of fraud brought against Lynch arising from the purchase of a horse. Once again the injured party was named Byrne, a small farmer from the parish of Arklow. In this case, the complaints came from three different priests. James Redmond of Arklow described Michael Byrne as "an honest industrious man" who had been defrauded by a priest.¹⁶ Apparently, Lynch had agreed a price of £27. 10s. with Byrne and had paid £5. 11s. The balance was borrowed from the bank with Byrne as guarantor. When the loan matured three months later, and Lynch had not paid, Byrne as guarantor was obliged to pay, so losing his money and his horse. "This looks as ugly a trick as could be played" was the comment of Frederick Donovan, a curate at Arklow. Byrne had called on a

¹⁵ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 9 Oct 1874; also 9 Oct 1874; DDA.

¹⁶ Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 14 Sept 1874, DDA.

number of priests but none would interfere. He went to see Lynch's sister but got no satisfaction and so, he was now appealing to the Cardinal through Donovan for the return of the horse.¹⁷

So what was Daniel Lynch's reaction to all of this? In a long letter, he gave his version of events and he attempted to explain how the debts had arisen. He began by stating that he owed £200 which he would pay at his convenience. As regards the horse, he stated that he had made the purchase only because the P.P. Galvin had insisted on him buying a horse. He had been assured by Byrne that payment would do at any time but, when people had seen that he was to be replaced in the parish, "they commenced to look after even a penny due". He was certain that the people thought well of him. "They love me and I am proud of it", he declared defiantly, "One swallow does not make a summer, one black ungrateful sheep does not represent the flock". He went on to refer to other outstanding debts and he attempted to explain them away. He then said that he had no wish to remain in his native Dublin and, if Cullen would give him a position for a few months, he would then set sail for America, "where I am sure of a welcome and a large field to do good in". In Aughrim, he complained that he had only a few shillings a week and from this, he was expected to keep two servants, a horse and car. Finally, he claimed that he had more property "than could, if sold, pay twice those I owe".¹⁸

In a letter to Galvin, Lynch warned the parish priest to "take care" of his tongue and his pen and he called Galvin "a false, treacherous man". What right had Galvin to the money the people wished to give him, he asked and he objected to the parish priest referring to him as "a bird of passage".¹⁹ Galvin commented to Cullen that Lynch's talk about the money the people wished to give him was probably a reference to the subscriptions he had collected for the stables, or "the roving money" as Galvin called it. Galvin also forwarded a number of unpaid bills "from town and country".²⁰

Evidently, these bills remained unpaid because, two years later, Phelan the grocer was still chasing the money owed him. He wrote first of all to Galvin, who had paid a previous bill from part of Lynch's dues. "I warned you I would never do so again or incur such obloquy", Galvin told the unhappy grocer, "I never gave any assurance, nor shall I ever do so, that I am to be responsible for any debts legally or

¹⁷ Frederick Donovan to Cullen, Arklow, 1 Nov 1874, DDA; Richard Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 16 Sept 1874, DDA.

¹⁸ G. D. Lynch to Cullen, Castleruddery, Stratford-on-Slane, Co. Wicklow, 12 Oct 1874, DDA.

¹⁹ G. D. Lynch to Galvin, 16 Upr. Dominick St., Dublin, 12 Nov 1874, DDA.

²⁰ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Rathdrum, 14 Nov 1874, DDA.

morally bar my own". Besides, Galvin added, Phelan had plenty of warnings before Lynch had departed.²¹ The grocer then appealed to Cullen but he was again disappointed. He requested the Cardinal to return Galvin's letter to hold "so that I may guard myself and my family in future". Phelan went on to offer some observations about Cullen not giving "to Ceasar [sic] what belongs to Ceasar" and "seporting [sic] your own cloth right or rong [sic]".²²

The parish of Rathdrum was rather unfortunate in its curates, if one is to judge from Galvin's letter of September 1874. Referring to Lynch, he said that as a successor to the last three curates and to the broken down friar sent there by the vicariate, he did not know what the people would make of it. He requested "some young safe reliable ascetic fresh from the anvil if possible" to be sent to the parish to retrieve the situation.²³

One Ardagh priest, Felix Duffy, was in such financial difficulties that he sought a transfer to England. The V.G., Neil O'Flanagan, hoped that Duffy would settle there, remarking to Woodlock: "as far as his career in this diocese goes, the only charge against him was his reckless extravagance in getting into debt. Your Lordship will be justified in saying so much and cannot be expected to account for his other escapades".²⁴ This latter is a reference to Duffy's drink problem and if this sounds like a problem being exported, then that is probably the correct interpretation.

To O'Flanagan's disappointment, Duffy did not settle in England and in 1889, he was applying for readmission to his native diocese. O'Flanagan's opinion was sought and he felt that Duffy should pay the debt he had contracted before he could hope to be reappointed to a curacy in Ardagh. If this was done, then he might be given another chance, although the cautious O'Flanagan had some fears that the bishop might regret such a move. The V.G. also added that, in his opinion, it would be for Duffy's greater good that he be reappointed an assistant priest in some of the Australian or American cities "where a priest's daily life is protected by a regular routine of duties and where he can start afresh". And in case his meaning was not perfectly clear, in a postscript O'Flanagan noted that the letter from the foreign bishop showed that Duffy could do as well in another diocese - "I mean other than Ardagh".²⁵ It looked as if

²¹ Extract from letter of Galvin to Phelan (in Cullen's hand), DDA.

²² James Phelan to Cullen, Aughrim, Co. Wicklow, 22 Jan 1876, DDA.

²³ Richard Galvin to Cullen, Avonpark, Rathdrum, 1 Sept 1874, DDA.

²⁴ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 3 Dec 1879, Ard DA.

²⁵ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, The Presbytery, Cloghan, King's Co., 27 July 1889, Ard DA.

O'Flanagan had started out by saying yes to Duffy returning to Ardagh but, in the end, was really recommending that he go elsewhere.

Some priests found themselves in financial difficulties simply because they did not have the knowledge and skills to cope and others because of their alcohol problems. In a different category altogether are priests like Kavanagh, Byrne and Butler of Dublin and Patrick Sheridan of Ardagh, who were often engaged in what can only be described as sharp practice in their attempts to supplement their own private financial resources. At times they preyed on vulnerable parishioners and they resorted to methods which were not merely questionable but, in some cases, quite clearly illegal.

In the case of Patrick Kavanagh, his problems seem to have arisen from debts incurred as a result of borrowing sums of money to fit up his residence while a curate in Blanchardstown in the early 1880's. The debt was estimated at sums varying between £700 and £1300 with interest reckoned at eleven per cent. Kavanagh's solution to the problem was to announce a Fr. Kavanagh testimonial in the form of collections to be taken up in the parish. The archbishop, Edward McCabe, issued a letter forbidding the testimonial but, according to James Manning, a curate in the parish, this did not prevent the collections from proceeding. The archbishop's letter, however, did have the effect of deterring some of the parishioners from contributing.²⁶

How successful Kavanagh's efforts were on this occasion is not known but two years later, he was trying again, this time as a curate in Swords. He issued a printed circular to parishioners promoting a bazaar, ostensibly to help build a curate's residence. The circular stated that the present residence was most unsuitable with rain coming into the bedroom at night and Kavanagh was not prepared to spend another night there. "In fact, it is in so rickety a condition that it may tumble down at any moment", he declared dramatically.²⁷

In sending out the circular, Kavanagh claimed that he was not aware that he was violating any diocesan statute. The parishioners had met some time ago, he told Archbishop Walsh, and they had passed some resolutions, including one to levy a tax of 6d. in the pound to build a curate's residence. A plot of ground was purchased and assigned to the archbishop and trustees. All agreed that a curate's residence was a necessity. All of this had been approved by the P.P., Kavanagh asserted, adding that he had no interest in the matter, except the common wish to provide a "good and

²⁶ James Manning C.C. to McCabe, Blanchardstown, 19 Feb 1884, DDA.

²⁷ Patrick Kavanagh C.C. to Walsh, Swords, 20 July 1886, DDA.

comfortable house". But, of course, if the archbishop wished to put a stop to the proceedings, then he (Kavanagh) would certainly comply.²⁸

The archbishop, aware of Kavanagh's poor record in financial matters, felt it necessary to check his story with the parish priest, David Mulcahy. Mulcahy agreed that the present house was in poor condition and that it may have contributed to the death of the previous occupant, Fr. Tom Murphy. Kavanagh had spent a considerable sum of money in improving the house and he had paid the rent for the first year when a middleman, who had been away for twenty years in Australia, turned up and claimed whatever rent was due. Mulcahy confirmed the story of the parishioners' meeting and the purchase of a site towards which he had advanced £60. It was necessary to purchase the site quickly and the P.P. did not have time to inform Walsh. The bazaar was organised to secure the remaining funds. Mulcahy was of the opinion that Kavanagh's health would be at risk in this house and he assured Walsh that, when Kavanagh had been compensated for improvements effected on his present dwelling, the curate would abide by whatever decision that Walsh might make.²⁹

While it does appear that, on this occasion, Kavanagh's dealings were not altogether unauthorised, nevertheless the archbishop's suspicions may have been well founded. In 1891, Kavanagh was the recipient of a strong letter from Walsh, who expressed his disappointment that "after all that occurred in the past", Kavanagh was still involved in commercial affairs and speculations. This time, Kavanagh was involved in a project aimed at raising £500 in £1 subscriptions with no list of directors or "other persons to stand before the public as bearing the financial responsibility of the scheme". Walsh then ordered Kavanagh to communicate with everyone who knew of his involvement in the scheme and inform them that the archbishop had ordered him to withdraw "in such a way that no misconception may remain in the mind of anyone who may have been induced to subscribe through the influence of your name". In the strongest terms, Walsh then forbade Kavanagh from engaging in commercial or other worldly affairs without the express permission of the archbishop. Kavanagh was to confine himself strictly to the discharge of the duties of his ministry "as they may be assigned to you from time to time by your parish priest or other ecclesiastical superior".³⁰

²⁸ Patrick Kavanagh to Walsh, Swords, 19 Aug 1886, DDA.

²⁹ D. P. Mulcahy to Walsh, Presbytery, St. Columkille's, Swords, 21 Aug 1886, DDA.

³⁰ William Walsh to Kavanagh, Archbishop's House, Dublin, 16 June 1891, (copy), DDA.

The very next day, Kavanagh responded, declaring that the archbishop had been "entirely misinformed". He stated that it was hoped to start a hand-loom factory in Wicklow under the auspices of the Irish Industrial League but that the project had come to nothing and had long since been abandoned. He added that he had encouraged the project but he denied that he had subscribed any money. He had not heard a word about it for months and the thought it was "dead and buried". But, it seemed, some friend "has dug up the corpse". He ended by declaring himself most obedient and most anxious to carry out the wishes of his archbishop.³¹

Walsh evidently was not impressed and he insisted on Kavanagh spending a month's retreat at Mount Melleray. The abbot was given strict instructions and one month later, Walsh received a report which stated that Kavanagh had given the utmost satisfaction. Not only did he comply with the archbishop's instructions but he had "continued in close, silent retreat nearly the whole time".³²

A charitable interpretation of Kavanagh's activities might be that he involved himself in financial undertakings which were greater than he had anticipated and for which he had neither the knowledge nor the expertise to cope. It is difficult, however, to extend such charity to the activities of two other Dublin priests, Michael Butler and Michael Byrne, whose dubious approach to raising finance provoked a large volume of correspondence in the latter part of the century. The first complaint against Butler came when he was curate at Eccles St. The parish priest, John Ryan, requested Butler's removal as a result of complaints from parishioners. One parishioner alleged that Butler had defrauded her of a considerable amount of money and another, "so sedate a man as Mr. O'Donnell" of a stockbroking firm, alleged that he was aware of transactions which made Butler a "disgrace to the cloth". The men of the Holy Confraternity complained that Butler had misappropriated funds, making endless demands but never offering an account of the expenditure. The P.P. was most unhappy with the curate in the performance of his parish duties, saying that he was "so apathetic about everything except money hunting". Ryan further stated that Butler did not pay his servants, that his bills were unpaid and that he was most unpleasant in manner both to the parish priest and his fellow curates.³³

Ryan's request was granted but Butler's removal to the parish of Balbriggan did not bring the desired improvement in his financial dealings. By his own admission,

³¹ Patrick Kavanagh to Walsh, Ashford, 17 June 1891, DDA.

³² B. Carthage to Walsh, Mount Melleray, Cappoquin, Co. Waterford, 10 Aug 1891, DDA.

³³ Jn. Ryan to Walsh, 39 Eccles St., Dublin, 19 Nov [1890], DDA.

there were unpaid shop bills amounting to £6. 7s. 4d. and he admitted that, one year earlier, when his brother was "in great stress", some people there had given him sums of money amounting to £61. Butler then glibly declared that these people were most friendly towards him, that he enjoyed their fullest confidence and that they would never annoy him " unless brought to do so by mischief", which, he pronounced rather sanctimoniously, "has much more to do with the government of the world than virtue and truth have". He went on to deny the charges made against him about neglect of his parish duties. He was aware that Archdeacon Keogh had great difficulty in taking him as a curate - "He thought I should be a notorious criminal", said Butler, "being sent from what is deemed the first to what was deemed the last curacy in the diocese". Keogh did not want his parish perceived as a "penitentiary". Butler praised the archdeacon, saying that he had been treated with every mark of respect and that he had been entrusted with the collections. Butler then observed that, since he had come to Balbriggan, he had not had the smallest disagreement with any parishioner, something which could not be said of other curates.³⁴

Archdeacon Keogh retired as parish priest of Balbriggan and was replaced in 1896 by Patrick Fee. In January, Fee wrote to Walsh to lodge complaints about Butler's latest financial activities. "Instead of trying to pay", the new P.P. reported, "he is going about borrowing from parishioners". In particular, Butler's unwillingness to meet his debts was causing problems for the P.P. in his efforts to raise money for the church restoration fund. The grocer and the butcher had refused to subscribe to the fund because of debts owed them by Butler. His landlord was owed £30 and there were other creditors "too numerous to mention". Fee, too, wished to be rid of the troublesome curate and he said that Butler had remarked: "If we cannot get on together I suppose we better try asunder".³⁵ Shortly afterwards, Fee was writing again, pressing for Butler's removal. He said that the curate was expecting a change and if this were true, then the P.P. did not have anything to add to what he had said already - "I leave him to your tender mercies" was his closing comment.³⁶ Butler was duly transferred to The Naul, where P.P. William Dunphy declared himself satisfied with the appointment.³⁷

By far the most serious charge made against Butler was in 1899 when a layman, John Farrell of Lusk, wrote to Walsh to complain about money owed to his brother Patrick. John Farrell stated that Butler had borrowed £196 from his brother,

³⁴ M. P. Butler to Walsh, Balbriggan, 30 Jan 1895, DDA.

³⁵ Patrick Fee to Walsh, Balbriggan, 24 Jan 1896, DDA.

³⁶ Patrick Fee to Walsh, Balbriggan, 3 Feb 1896, DDA.

³⁷ William Dunphy to Walsh, Damastown, Naul, 6 Feb 1896, DDA.

who was then single. Later, after Patrick had married, Butler borrowed £100 and he also persuaded Patrick to go security for him in the Royal Bank of Ireland for £34. This had been renewed a couple of times and Butler had received other sums of money without repaying any. John Farrell had brought the matter to a solicitor and an agreement had been drafted, by which the defaulting priest undertook to repay £200 in instalments of £30 each three months with 5% interest on the money. The first instalment had been paid but John Farrell feared that Butler would not continue to pay as he had failed so often in the past. Farrell added that the affair had had a very detrimental effect on his brother's mental stability and that his wife and small children had to leave him, "fearing that he might do them harm".³⁸ This latter point was confirmed in an enclosed letter from a sister of Patrick Farrell.³⁹

Some days later, John Farrell wrote again, enclosing a letter from the Royal Bank requesting Patrick Farrell to pay £19 balance on a bill of £34 which Butler had failed to pay. Again, John Farrell referred to the effect that the affair was having on his brother, who was now said to be in a state of deep depression. Butler had refused to say what he had done with the money, which represented "the hard earnings of a life time on a small farm of 26 acres". John Farrell appealed to Walsh to intervene and see that justice was done.⁴⁰

At the same time, Archbishop Walsh was receiving letters from another of Butler's many creditors. This time the complainant was Kate MacMahon of Bellevue, Kilkenny, who warned the archbishop that if he did not take appropriate action, then it would be necessary for her solicitors to take "very strong measures" against Michael Butler, at that time curate at Oldtown. Once again, Butler had defaulted on repayments on a sum of money borrowed, although he had promised faithfully to make the repayments. He had also allowed the insurance policy on his life, given as collateral security, to lapse. Although the amount of the interest was small, about £11 yearly, Kate MacMahon found it a great hardship not to receive it and she had to give up her house and furniture to avoid going into debt. "The arrest of Fr. would be the next step to be taken in the event of his not paying", MacMahon warned, although she was hoping that she would not be forced to have recourse to such "a painful proceeding" and, also, she had been advised by her confessor to avoid a scandal.⁴¹

³⁸ John Farrell to Walsh, Courtlough, Lusk, Co. Dublin, 26 Jan 1899; 30 Jan 1899; DDA.

³⁹ Marianne Seaver to Walsh, undated, Balbriggan, DDA.

⁴⁰ John Farrell to Walsh, Courtlough, Lusk, 11 Feb 1899, DDA.

⁴¹ Kate MacMahon to Walsh, Bellevue, Kilkenny, 11 March 1899, DDA.

Four days after receiving this letter, Walsh wrote to the wayward curate. He pointed out to Butler that his borrowing was a direct violation of the Maynooth statutes and would have been so even if Butler had faithfully intended to fulfill his obligation of repaying. "But you have failed to meet your obligation", Walsh continued, "and this failure on your part has been attended with the most disastrous results". He could not allow any priest who had shown such recklessness to hold a position in the diocese, as Butler had continued, despite many warnings, to disregard "the solemn obligations of justice". He referred to the MacMahon case, saying that "a lady, through her foolish confidence" in Butler as a priest had suffered such loss that she had been obliged to give up her house and sell off her furniture. "Your case has now reached a point", the archbishop declared, "at which it has become a matter of urgent duty for me to bring such despicable proceedings to an end or, if that be impossible, to make it plain that such a line of action as yours is one that disqualifies you from holding a place amongst the working clergy of the diocese".⁴²

Walsh, then, had finally decided that Butler's habits could not be changed simply by moving him from one parish to another. The archbishop now made it clear to Butler that he would be removed forthwith from his curacy unless he produced in writing from each of the two creditors a statement that a satisfactory arrangement had been put in place to meet the debts. Walsh was well aware that it would be very difficult for the creditors to place any credence in Butler's promises to pay. "But if this unhappily should be the case", Walsh warned, "it will be only a further evidence of the impossibility of allowing you to continue in a position to bring further discredit on the clergy of this diocese".⁴³

Butler explained the MacMahon affair by saying that, twenty years before, Kate MacMahon's late husband "got a charge" on property belonging to Butler's father for about £180. Subsequently, Butler maintained, he himself had given a life insurance policy as collateral and the interest was "now and then" paid through him. He denied ever having received money from MacMahon or her husband. Some arrears of interest had accrued "through force of circumstances" but he had called on MacMahon some months before and told her that his father was arranging to purchase his place through the Land Commission and that, when the purchase was completed, he would be able to pay the full amount due to her. According to Butler, the purchase had not been completed because "the usual routine which is slow, especially in the case of encumbered estate, is being gone through". He admitted that Mrs. MacMahon would

⁴² William Walsh to Butler, Archbishop's House, Dublin, 15 March 1899, (copy), DDA.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

miss the interest as her income was not large, but he could not believe that he was, in any way, the cause of her having to give up house and furniture. She had let her house when she could, Butler claimed, and "went to travel" and now, finding it difficult to let the house, she had sold it. He had written to Mrs. MacMahon, who was a relative of his, but he would do all he could to hasten the payment of the interest and of the principal for which she held a mortgage.⁴⁴

In the case of Patrick Farrell, Butler stated that Farrell's mental health had always been suspect and "it is well known", the curate asserted, "and admitted by himself that he has never been as well as since he placed himself under my guidance". In Butler's opinion, Patrick Farrell was likely to be "always a chronic patient" and his present condition was caused not by Butler's failure to pay but by "domestic discomfort". The curate then went on to say that Farrell had brought him, "quite unasked", his deposit receipt and cash and he had requested Butler to take charge of it. Butler claimed that he had lodged money to Farrell's account from time to time to be used as Farrell wished. Describing Farrell's brother, John, as "a most excitable man", Butler stated that he had returned any money he had borrowed from Patrick Farrell's wife. He admitted having entered into a formal agreement. He did not say why the agreement was necessary but he was adamant that he had abided faithfully by the terms of the agreement. "Patrick Farrell was and is thoroughly satisfied", wrote the priest, "and nothing in the world would upset him more than to injure me". The solicitor now held the agreement and Butler was insistent that he had repaid most of the money owed.⁴⁵

Responding to the archbishop's charge of recklessness, Butler said that he had "always endeavoured to do justice, not only in discharging my personal obligations, but helping others, in any way I could, to do justice and be safe from wrong". However, during the last seven years, with a greatly reduced income and greatly increased expenses, he had felt a little in need of help himself. He continued in this vein, adding that he had not spent, in all his years as a priest, five pounds on vacation and recreation. He was hurt, too, at being accused of bringing discredit on the clergy of the diocese and he pointed to the increase in numbers receiving communion and attending the sacraments as proof of his sincerity and industry. He was prepared "to do anything more" that the archbishop might wish and he hoped that he would soon be relieved "from the excruciating torture which your letter and its menace" had caused.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ M. Butler to Walsh, St. Mary's, Ballybohill, Oldtown, Co. Dublin, 16 March 1899, DDA.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

The response to this letter from the archbishop was brief and to the point. He was clearly unimpressed with Butler's explanations and he noted the fact that Butler had not referred to his violation of the Maynooth statutes. Walsh expressed the hope that he would not have to write a third time and he stated curtly: "You ask me whether I wish you to do anything. I wish you of course to do what I have already told you is necessary to be done".⁴⁷

Kate MacMahon had received a letter from Butler but, writing to Walsh from London, she informed the archbishop that she had referred the matter to her solicitor who was authorised to settle the affair in accordance with the archbishop's wishes.⁴⁸

Other creditors were pressing their claims and Walsh was still receiving invoices.⁴⁹ In April, the incorrigible Butler wrote to say that he did not think the archbishop would require anything further from him, given that an agreement had been reached with the Farrells. He informed Walsh that Patrick Farrell was mentally unfit to do business and that he had deposited with Farrell's solicitor the insurance policy on his life. Having heard from Kate MacMahon, he had written to her solicitor "making the best proposal I could for the payment of arrears of interest and, later, of the principal", but as yet he had received no reply. Regarding his violation of the Maynooth statutes, he excused himself on the grounds that, at the very outset of his priestly career, he had to undertake obligations "far beyond what that statute lays down" and he had done so with the full knowledge of his superiors at the time.⁵⁰

The reluctance on Butler's part to be bound by any agreement provoked a reply from Walsh in which he voiced again his dismay at Butler's obvious disregard for the directive that had been given. Although the appointed time had elapsed, Walsh was prepared to offer Butler one last opportunity by extending the deadline to the end of April. A written statement from the creditors or their solicitors was still "the indispensable condition" for Butler to remain in the active ministry in Dublin. It would appear, too, from this letter that Walsh was finding it difficult to keep his patience with the offending curate and the exasperated archbishop wrote: "It is impossible for you to misunderstand the plain meaning of this letter. I have to say this because you seem to

⁴⁷ William J. Walsh to Butler, Archbishop's House, 22 March 1899, (copy), DDA.

⁴⁸ Kate E. MacMahon to Walsh, undated, 6 Philbeach Gardens, Earls court, London S.W., DDA.

⁴⁹ Invoice from P. Ceppi and Sons, Picture Frame and Statuary Manufacturers, 8 & 9 Wellington Quay, Dublin, dated 29 March 1899, DDA.

⁵⁰ M. Butler to Walsh, St. Mary's, Ballybohill, Co. Dublin, 8 April 1899, DDA.

think that I can be led to believe that you misunderstood the equally plain meaning of my former letter to you".⁵¹

Six days before the deadline was due to expire, Butler wrote to Walsh enclosing a letter from Patrick Farrell's solicitor. This letter gave details of an agreement which, as Butler rather credulously pointed out, was binding on Farrell and his representatives as well as the priest himself. Butler said that he had written to MacMahon's solicitor several times and, having finally received a reply, he was inferring that the solicitor was either unable or unwilling to act for her. In his reply, the solicitor stated that he would have to include Butler's father in any arrangement. Again, Butler expressed his belief that Mrs. MacMahon could not be at any loss on his account and he thought that at present she was in Rome.⁵²

This statement was not any more acceptable to the archbishop and Butler expressed his disappointment, repeating yet again that an agreement had been reached with the Farrells. He claimed that his part in the MacMahon affair had been "very secondary" and that an arrangement could not be made that would exclude his father, the principal borrower. He said too that he was sure that these matters had been put before the archbishop "as being very different from what they really are" and that "representations untrue and unjust seem to have done their mischief".⁵³

And all the while the bills were arriving at Archbishop's House. The latest came from John Lawler of Phibsboro Road from whom Butler had obtained goods on several occasions since January 1898 and had left the bills unpaid. Lawler described himself as "struggling for a living under great difficulties" and "in a bad way financially", so much so that he declared that, if he did not obtain money very soon, his business would be "very much injured", if not worse.⁵⁴

The archbishop, though, was busy pursuing the elusive Butler for a settlement in the MacMahon case. In July 1899, the priest wrote to say that he had seen his solicitor and, at his suggestion, had written out a proposed settlement. He agreed to pay the arrears of interest, £23, within a short time, to keep the insurance policy in force and to have the principal reduced by small annual payments. The solicitor would not give final approval until he had heard from Kate MacMahon, who, still on her travels, was at that time in Lucerne. The solicitor had assured Butler that, if the

⁵¹ William J. Walsh to Butler, 13 April 1899, (copy), DDA.

⁵² M. Butler to Walsh, St. Mary's, Ballybohill, Oldtown, Co. Dublin, 25 April 1899, DDA.

⁵³ M. Butler to Walsh, St. Mary's, Ballybohill, Co. Dublin, 5 May 1899, DDA.

⁵⁴ John Lawler to Walsh, 156 Phibsboro Road, Dublin, 5 June 1899, DDA.

payments of interest were made regularly, then there would be no pressure for payment of the principal. Butler had news, too, of Patrick Farrell, who was in Richmond asylum. This meant that the agreement with him was, for the time being, suspended. He had visited Farrell, who had declared himself satisfied with the agreement but was depressed at being away from his own home.⁵⁵

In September, John Farrell complained again that Butler was no longer making the payments as agreed, namely, £200 to be paid by quarterly instalments of £30 and his life insurance policy of £200. So far, Butler had paid only £27 and Patrick Farrell had been committed to Richmond asylum after an attempt to drown himself. Butler had paid none of the quarterly instalments since the previous January nor had he paid the premium on his policy. Farrell's wife had called on Butler but had been told that he might not pay if he did not feel like it. The affair was well known "all over the three parishes of Naul, Lusk and Balbriggan", John Farrell wrote and he was appealing once again to the archbishop so that money would be paid to Patrick Farrell's wife and children.⁵⁶

Butler's next move was to write to Walsh, enclosing a letter from Patrick Farrell, dated 18 September 1899, in which Farrell stated that he was quite satisfied with the agreement and that he knew that Butler would do the best for Farrell and his family. In his covering letter, Butler said that Farrell was well and quite capable of looking after his own affairs. Furthermore, he believed that Farrell had never discussed the matter with his immediate relatives. He was still awaiting a reply from Mrs. MacMahon or her solicitor but he believed "the good lady" was still travelling and not concerning herself about this matter.⁵⁷

How Butler had managed thus far to remain in the active ministry is something of a mystery. However, on 16 October, Walsh wrote to inform him that he was being changed from his present position of curate to a position in which the archbishop could be free of responsibility for the troubles resulting from Butler's "unhappily unsettled financial condition". Butler was now appointed to the chaplaincy at Warrenmount convent, Dublin. The archbishop was prepared to accept Patrick Farrell's statement giving Butler "the fullest credit on the score of the strange transaction to which it refers", but, as regards the other case, "in which a lady capable of managing her affairs is concerned", the position was as previously stated. Now, Butler was being moved

⁵⁵ M. Butler to Walsh, St. Mary's, Ballybohill, Oldtown, Co. Dublin, 13 July 1899, DDA.

⁵⁶ John Farrell to Walsh, Courtlough, Lusk, Co. Dublin, 19 Sept 1899, DDA.

⁵⁷ M. Butler to Walsh, St. Mary's, Ballybohill, Oldtown, Co. Dublin, 9 Oct 1899, DDA.

but Walsh was not very sanguine that this would deter him from "engaging in new financial proceedings which will involve further discredit". Walsh declared his determination to protect the credit of the diocesan clergy and he drew Butler's attention to the relevant Maynooth statute. He forbade Butler under penalty of suspension *ipso facto* from incurring debt or borrowing money beyond the amount mentioned in the statute without previous episcopal sanction.⁵⁸

There was nothing straightforward for Michael Butler and any injunction placed on him by Walsh he proceeded to interpret to his own advantage. From his lodgings at South Circular Road, he wrote to say that he interpreted the injunction as meaning that he was not to incur any liability over £30 - over and above what he already owed - and that it should not prevent him from raising loans to meet debts due. He was grieved that Walsh felt that he had disregarded the warnings and once more, he protested that he had done his best to settle the two long running disputes. "I am simply astounded", he wrote, "to find Your Grace make this the turning-point of your action dictated in your last letter to me; and I must respectfully submit that, if *it is not now*, it must have been *ab initio* and for over twenty years back, a disqualification for which I have had so heavy and anxious, and, thank God, so successful a share during all these years".⁵⁹

In another letter the following month, Butler again pleaded persecution, arguing that he had always been willing to help others and that the number of times he had sought favours for himself he could count on his "five fingers without going over them a second time". This, he felt, should have counted in his favour, judged by the "*ordinarie contingentia*" of life. But, the aggrieved Butler pleaded, they have been "misrepresented, exaggerated, multiplied over and over" and turned against him "with a vengeance", leaving him now in a situation "that stuns and dismays every thoughtful man who sees and considers it". He ended with a rather desperate and, one must assume, unavailing appeal - "it is on Your Grace I depend and I can look only to you to vindicate me against any wrong I have suffered and to enable me to repair any wrong I have done and to correct any mistakes I have made, which I am determined to do by all means".⁶⁰ Sentiments which, however well intended, one would have to treat with extreme scepticism on the evidence of previous behaviour.

It is very difficult to understand Butler's motivation and, in particular, his apparent failure to appreciate the harm he was causing. It may have been that his

⁵⁸ William J. Walsh to Butler, Archbishop's House, Dublin, 16 Oct 1899, (copy), DDA.

⁵⁹ M. Butler to Walsh, 68 Sth. Circular Road, Portobello, Dublin, 22 Oct 1899, DDA.

⁶⁰ M. P. Butler to Walsh, 68 South Circular Road, Portobello, Dublin, 12 Nov 1899, DDA.

chronic habit of running up debts or his avarice simply blinded him to the adverse side of his financial activities and yet, throughout his correspondence, he maintains a kind of naivete and a disingenuousness that almost approaches sincerity.

Over these same years, there was another curate in Dublin diocese, Michael Byrne of Ballytore, Co. Kildare, who was constantly in financial difficulties. It is not easy to establish exactly what caused the problem initially but it seems to have arisen from the wills of a Dr. Hughes of Naas and a Fr. Wall, in both of which Byrne was named as executor. According to Byrne, Wall had left money for charitable purposes and had told Byrne that he should not see his (Byrne's) brothers and sisters short. Byrne took this to mean that he could make available to his family money to which they were not entitled.⁶¹ And in another letter, Byrne stated that his present predicament had been brought about "through a desire to help" his immediate relatives "with no intention of doing injustice to anyone".⁶²

In any case, Walsh found the misdemeanours sufficiently serious to suspend Byrne. In January 1896, Byrne wrote to say that the matter was "in a fair way of settlement". He then made the strange statement that there was never the smallest danger of any injustice being done to anyone but that "things came very inconvenient" to him in connection with the case. The removal of his faculties to celebrate mass he found particularly painful and he requested the archbishop to reconsider his decision.⁶³ He begged the archbishop's forgiveness and assured him that there was no danger of the case being brought before the court as Walsh had feared.⁶⁴

In June, Byrne was pleading with Walsh once more, this time stating that he had no means of support and "nowhere to look for it" and that, unless Walsh took a compassionate view of his case, then his position was hopeless. He also added that he had been misled in regard to the residue of the assets of Dr. Hughes of Naas and he felt that he could use it to discharge Fr. Wall's remaining liabilities and other debts.⁶⁵

Unlike Butler, Michael Byrne acknowledged his wrongdoing and he stated his determination to do all that he could to pay off his debts - "I have done wrong, am sorry and am determined as far as I can to undo the wrong". He was concerned that he had no means of support and if Walsh could not see his way to giving him a post in

⁶¹ M. Byrne to Walsh, Battlemount, Ballytore, Co. Kildare, 13 March 1896, DDA.

⁶² M. Byrne to Walsh, Battlemount, Ballytore, Co. Kildare, 15 June 1896, DDA.

⁶³ M. Byrne to Walsh, Battlemount, Ballytore, Co. Kildare, 16 Jan 1896, DDA.

⁶⁴ M. Byrne to Walsh, Battlemount, Ballytore, Co. Kildare, 12 Jan 1896, DDA.

⁶⁵ M. Byrne to Walsh, Battlemount, Ballytore, Co. Kildare, 15 June 1896, DDA.

Dublin, then he was prepared to leave Ireland and try his luck in England or Scotland. "I should prefer anything rather than be as I am", he commented.⁶⁶

Two years later, in 1898, Byrne had still not been restored. He was now arguing that, since two of the sources from which he had expected help with discharging his liabilities were not "available", if his faculties were restored and he were given an appointment, then a trustee could be appointed to receive some of his money with a view to clearing his debts.⁶⁷ This suggestion was taken up by Walsh and Byrne entered into a formal arrangement whereby a trustee was appointed to oversee Byrne's repayments.⁶⁸

As in the case of Butler, Byrne was appointed to a chaplaincy - to the Sacred Heart convent in Leeson Street. But unlike Butler, Byrne had requested the position and he was extremely grateful for it. He restated his intention of paying his debts "no matter how small the income may be".⁶⁹ And it does seem that, of the two, Byrne was much more likely to succeed as there is no evidence to show that he suffered the same chronic addiction as Butler to raising debts and leaving them unpaid.

Undue interest in the accumulation of wealth and property would seem to have been the root cause of the difficulties of John D. McGarvey, parish priest of Milford in the diocese of Raphoe. McGarvey, who died in 1887 leaving assets amounting to £24,097,⁷⁰ set about amassing his fortune in a ruthless and single minded manner and he seemed to have operated on the principle of holding on to all moneys until absolutely forced to part with them. His reluctance to pay his curates their just share of parochial finances has already been discussed⁷¹ and his avaricious nature is further illustrated in the case of John McRory, a schoolteacher who complained that McGarvey required him to pay the rent of the schoolhouse and was withholding the quarterly payment of £6 due to him. McGarvey had even threatened to close the school if the rent was not paid.⁷² Only when the bishop intervened at McRory's behest did the parish priest agree to pay the £6 owing.⁷³

⁶⁶ M. Byrne to Walsh, Battlemount, Ballytore, Co. Kildare, 22 June 1896, DDA.

⁶⁷ M. Byrne to Walsh, Battlemount, Ballytore, Co. Kildare, 16 May 1898, DDA.

⁶⁸ M. Byrne to Walsh, Battlemount, Ballytore, Co. Kildare, 26 May 1898; 29 May 1898; DDA.

⁶⁹ M. Byrne to Walsh, Battlemount, Ballytore, Co. Kildare, 13 June 1898; 14 April 1899; DDA.

⁷⁰ Wills and Administrations 1888, p. 472, NA.

⁷¹ cf. Chapter 2, Parish Priests and Curates, pp.41-2.

⁷² John McRory to Rev. J. Daly, Bridge End, Ramelton, 14 July 1871; 17 July 1871, RDA.

⁷³ John McRory to McDevitt, Bridge End N.S., 3 April 1872; McGarvey to Post Master, Milford, undated, RDA.

This aspect of McGarvey's character permeated all his dealings and sometimes involved him in disputes of the most petty nature. In November 1874, his curate, Bernard Walker, informed the bishop of an incident in a hotel, owned by a Mrs. Henderson, in which McGarvey and his curates had dined. McGarvey objected strongly to the charges being asked and he threatened to publish them in a newspaper. Mrs. Henderson responded by asserting that she would defend herself by publishing a list of the items purchased on the occasion. Walker, embarrassed by his parish priest's behaviour, requested the bishop to intervene and so prevent McGarvey from carrying out his threat. The two curates had paid their own share of the bill but it seems that even this did not satisfy the miserly parish priest.⁷⁴

There were charges of a much more serious nature brought against McGarvey. Bernard Breslin of Northumberland in England wrote to Bishop James McDevitt to say that his father, a building contractor, had built a graveyard wall in Ardara and had not been paid for the work.⁷⁵ And in September 1875, McDevitt called McGarvey to task for his management of finances. In response to McGarvey's request for an appointment to Ardara parish, the bishop wrote: "It was reported to me some years since that you had not satisfied the people of Ardara in the matter of accounts of certain parochial receipts. I was told recently that you kept the rent of two houses purchased for a proposed school for six or seven years and this is a matter it is well you should check up on, possibly you may have acted honestly in fact".⁷⁶

McGarvey's response to the bishop in this instance was to complain about the leasing of houses for which he had received no rents. One man had gone to America leaving the rent unpaid, another had lived in that same house for two or three years and had paid no rent. McGarvey stated that he had paid £200 for the houses and that he had agreed to leave them to the parish for £220.⁷⁷ Presumably, he felt justified in offering this explanation, whereas the people of Ardara no doubt were under the impression that the houses had been purchased with parochial funds for parochial purposes in the first instance. Here again is evidence of that blurred distinction between private and parochial property which allowed opportunist and avaricious priests to appropriate to themselves what was, in the popular perception, the property of the parish.

As has been noted, the diocese of Ardagh had experienced its share of problems with defaulting priests. In some cases, the failure to repay money borrowed or to pay

⁷⁴ Bernard Walker to McDevitt, Rathmullen, 29 Nov 1874, RDA.

⁷⁵ Bernard Breslin to McDevitt, Mount Carmel, Northumberland Co., 26 Oct 1873, RDA.

⁷⁶ James McDevitt to McGarvey, Letterkenny, 26 September 1875 (copy), RDA.

⁷⁷ J. D. McGarvey to McDevitt, Milford, 27 Sept 1875, RDA.

bills was associated with individual problems with alcohol. But it does appear that the problem was more widespread, if one is to judge from a comment of the Vicar General, Neil O'Flanagan, in January 1887. O'Flanagan was writing to a Fr. O'Reilly about money he had borrowed some years earlier in Columbkille and which had not been repaid. He had not heard from O'Reilly and O'Flanagan expressed the fear that this was becoming "a very common practice latterly amongst curates".⁷⁸

The problem was not confined to curates and indeed one of the worst cases recorded is that of Patrick Sheridan, canon and parish priest of Ferbane. Avarice would certainly seem to be the underlying cause of Sheridan's financial problems. Even before he came to Ferbane, Sheridan had already established a track record of defaulting on payments and he was pursued from parish to parish by his creditors. Denis Grey, P.P. of Drumshambo, was able to inform Bishop Woodlock that Sheridan seldom paid his bills until compelled to do so. "Either from forgetfulness or some other motive [he] tries to shirk them altogether and make others responsible for them", Grey remarked and he quoted the case of a Mr. Kelly of Gardiner St., Dublin, who had sold goods to Sheridan and, although presenting his bill several times, had not received even a reply. This man had written to Grey to find out if Sheridan was dead or alive and Grey, in support of the point made by O'Flanagan above, stated that he had seen other letters written to priests of the diocese from wine merchants in France.⁷⁹

Not that Grey himself was a model of rectitude, judging from a letter from Michael Corcoran, P.P. of Gowna, in 1889, in which he referred to money owed to Grey's housekeeper. The woman, Margaret Kearney, was afraid that if she waited for payment until Grey died, there would not be sufficient money left to pay what was due to her. Corcoran had advised her to insist on getting her money then but, when she approached Grey, she was told that she was owed no money and that she would get none. Corcoran was asking the bishop for a memorandum, which he would show to Grey and, if Grey still refused to pay, then the housekeeper would have no option but to sue. Corcoran then added the rather cryptic comment: "If it should have the effect which is quite possible of breaking up Fr. Grey's household as at present constituted so much the better". This probably means that Grey had members of his family living with him as he was, apparently, growing "more helpless in mind and body and therefore more dependent on others".⁸⁰

⁷⁸ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 17 Jan 1887, Ard DA.

⁷⁹ D. Grey to Woodlock, Drumshambo, 22 Oct [no year], Ard DA.

⁸⁰ M. Corcoran to Woodlock, Cortober, Gowna, Cavan, 19 Aug 1892, Ard DA.

Patrick Sheridan was not helpless in mind and body and one of his creditors, a man called Donegan, was determined that Sheridan should pay his debts. Consequently, he pursued the priest in the most persistent and dogged manner. Equally, Patrick Reddy, P.P. of Keadue, was determined that he was not going to inherit Sheridan's debts or be in any way responsible for them. Reddy informed the bishop that Donegan's account had come to hand and that he would have "nothing whatever to say to this account". He remarked that the bishop, who was then two years in the diocese, had probably never heard that Sheridan's keeping of the accounts of the Keadue parochial church building fund was managed in a way "that provoked the condemnation of all who heard of it". Reddy's predecessor, Dr. Monahan, had likewise "declined the honour of paying this debt".⁸¹

Two days later, Reddy sent the bishop Donegan's account with the comment: "It will be sufficient to state to Canon Sheridan that I deny the debt is a parochial one; or if it be, that he should have paid for it". According to Reddy, when Dr. Monahan took possession of the parish, he was alarmed at the numerous demands made against it by Sheridan. Monahan had appealed to the late bishop to interfere and the bishop made Sheridan draw up a list of the debts and sign a paper to the effect that "the list contained every farthing in the parish due to Canon Sheridan". Monahan still had this document in his possession and he had advised Reddy to call on him in case Sheridan sought to have Donegan's account paid by Keadue parish. "Observe", remarked Reddy, "that Canon Sheridan never dared to enforce the claim against Canon Monahan who could muzzle him at once". Then Reddy remarked wittily: "Let the Canons fight it out. It will be a grand artillery duel. Your Lordship will then be able to see how preposterous is this claim, which if preferred by a layman would be designated as fraudulent".⁸²

Sheridan persisted in his attempts to have the bill paid by his former parishioners but Reddy was insistent that he would not pay and he said that he would submit to the diocesan court set up by the bishop to "decide the case, Sheridan v. Kilronan". "*In die mala libera me domine*" was Reddy's wry comment. He suggested that the best day to have the case heard was the first day after Christmas when the diocesan chapter assembled in the cathedral, as this would be most convenient for judges and litigants. In Reddy's view, an additional advantage would be that Dr. Monahan and Dr. Lee, V.G., would be present if required. He was of the opinion also that there could be no satisfactory outcome to such a trial, as Canon Sheridan would appeal again and again and "the thing may be almost interminable". To end the

⁸¹ P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, 20 Oct 1881, Ard DA.

⁸² P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, 22 Oct 1881, Ard DA.

confusion, Reddy proposed that Donegan be directed to recover from Canon Sheridan by legal process in the civil courts the amount due to him and then let the Canon bring Reddy before the *judices*. The advantage of this would be that Donegan would certainly be paid. Reddy concluded: "I certainly deem it very hard and unfair that I must go to Longford to heaven knows where to combat a claim and at my own expense that Your Lordship knows well I am in no way responsible for".⁸³

The inquiry was held on 6 February 1882 at Longford cathedral and the result was something of a compromise. The judges found that the debts were due by the parishes of Scrabby, Drumshambo, Kilronan and Ferbane, in all of which Sheridan had served, and that they must be met by the respective P.P's out of parochial funds at their disposal for such purposes. Sheridan was acquitted of any intention to misapply trust monies - a strange decision, given his repeated offences in a number of parishes. The court found that he had acted irregularly "by applying monies collected with the express mention of certain specific objects to other parochial purposes" and this certainly sounds like misapplying trust monies. Sheridan was also found guilty of grave negligence in allowing Donegan's bills to remain unpaid over such a long period and, as a punishment, he was obliged to pay a fine of £10, which would be allocated by the judges towards the payment of these debts or towards some charity. He was also instructed to write a letter which would be of assistance to the various P.P's in their attempts to collect from their parishioners the money to meet the debts which Sheridan had incurred. The following month, Sheridan sent the bishop a sum of £30. 1s. 6d. to discharge "entirely" the amount due to Donegan for church goods supplied to Ferbane. He also enclosed the £10 "to answer the penalty imposed on me for zeal in God's house".⁸⁴

There the matter did not end, as some parish priests understandably objected to being obliged to pay debts incurred by Sheridan during his ministry in a particular parish. The parish priest of Gowna, Michael Corcoran, in reply to the bishop, said that he remembered well the bill that was sent to him for altar requisites purchased by Sheridan during his time as curate there. "The money no doubt must be due to Mr. Donegan", Corcoran argued logically, "otherwise he would not claim it but it seems strange that he should leave it unclaimed for over twenty years and it seems equally strange that Canon Sheridan should leave money due so long for goods got by him without even letting Fr. Grey or any other priest here know that it was done or how it came to be due". Grey, who was P.P. at the time the goods were purchased, stated

⁸³ P. Reddy to Woodlock, Keadue, 12 Dec 1881, Ard DA.

⁸⁴ P. Sheridan to Woodlock, Ferbane, 29 March 1882, ArdDA.

that no application had ever been made to him either by Donegan or Sheridan in regard to this debt. Corcoran now requested an invoice from the bishop so that he would know what the particular articles were and could then supply an estimate as required by the bishop.⁸⁵

"I hope Canon Sheridan's placid state may not again be ruffled", Archdeacon O'Flanagan wrote to Bishop Woodlock with mild sarcasm the following month, "but I fear there is another claim hanging over him". This time the claim was for £7 or £8 for work done on Scrabby chapel and it came from a widow for work done by her late husband when Sheridan was curate in the parish.⁸⁶

It would appear that Sheridan's problems were not confined to his dealings with traders and merchants. There were question marks, too, with regard to parish collections, as is clear from a request of Bishop Woodlock in 1883 to Sheridan to supply a detailed list of collections made "within the last few years". Sheridan replied that he had never kept such a list as he was never required to do so and that such collections as he had made were always handed in at the appointed time. As a general rule, the collections were handed to the bishop himself but, said Sheridan, "you could not expect to have a memory to enable me to give the dates you require". No priest in the diocese was required to do so, he protested, and he considered such a request to be unreasonable. Then, in an application of his own particular logic, he added: "Had all these collections been unmade, I should have been apprised of it in due time, and when my memory would enable me to contradict such statements". He declared that in all his time on the mission, he had never before been accused of such neglect and he ended that when they met, he would satisfy the bishop in regard to his queries. "I trust that in future more regard will be had for my priestly character..." was his parting shot.⁸⁷

If avarice was at the root of Sheridan's problems in meeting his debts, that he had an arrogance to match it is evident from his dealings with the members of the Ferbane branch of the Irish National League. In February 1886, the branch met to discuss the difficulties they were having with their P.P. and they forwarded a copy of the resolutions to Woodlock. The resolutions referred to the abusive manner which Sheridan had adopted towards members of the committee. The ensuing row is discussed elsewhere.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ M. Corcoran to Woodlock, Gowna, Co. Cavan, 4 April 1882, ArdDA.

⁸⁶ N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 5 May 1882; Hugh E. Kelly to Woodlock, Post Office, Granard, 13 June 1882; Ard DA.

⁸⁷ Patrick Sheridan to Woodlock, Ferbane, 15 April 1883, ArdDA.

⁸⁸ cf. chapter 10, Relations with the Laity, pp.290-6.

Part of the P.P's problem with the branch of the League had to do with the complaints lodged against him by a body called the Fair and Markets committee of Ferbane. In March, they wrote to the bishop to say that they hoped by doing so to avoid being forced to place the matter in the hands of a solicitor. Two years previously, the members had subscribed over £60 to fund the establishment of fairs and markets in the town. Sheridan was appointed president of the managing committee and the money was lodged with the treasurer, a man called Maloney. Later, Sheridan had caused the money to be handed over to him and he had lodged it in the bank under his own signature and that of the treasurer. The Canon then refused to make money available to subscribers and he dismissed the delegation sent to meet him with the remark that he would turn Ferbane into a "crossroads". "We respectfully submit", the letter went on, "that Canon Sheridan has forcibly and illegally possessed himself of our property". Complainants were reluctant at this point to institute legal proceedings and so they were informing the bishop to see what he could do. "But failing this", they warned, "we are determined at any cost to have what is legally our own"; and the letter ended: "It is extremely annoying that buyers come a distance of fourteen miles to purchase the produce in our markets, when our money, subscribed to benefit the town, must lie dormant at the whim of Canon Sheridan". This letter was signed by the vice president, treasurer and members of the committee.⁸⁹

The bishop wrote to Maloney, acknowledging receipt of the document and promising to investigate the matter.⁹⁰ At the same time, he wrote to Sheridan, informing him that he had received a document making a serious charge against him and requesting the parish priest to let him know the full facts and how "this cause of discussion can be arranged satisfactorily".⁹¹

"That I should be charged with plundering other peoples' money on this head and that by a few Catholics is an anomaly in this county", Sheridan thundered in response. He assured the bishop that the money had been deposited in the bank in Tullamore in the same way as a current account and that three trustees generally signed cheques for required amounts for the market days. By way of explanation, he then offered two reasons for withholding payment which were quite obscure and, no doubt, designedly so. Sheridan claimed that a few of these people had formed themselves into a committee "for the purpose of getting other peoples' money" and that they had never

⁸⁹ Fair and Markets Committee, Ferbane, 23 March 1886, signed by vice president, treasurer and committee members, ArdDA.

⁹⁰ Barth. Woodlock to Maloney, 27 March 1886, (copy), ArdDA.

⁹¹ Barth. Woodlock to Sheridan, St. Mary's, Athlone, 26 March 1886, (copy), ArdDA.

given him "the smallest intimation of any such meeting". They had sent him a "most insulting document demanding the money" though he was a subscriber, member of committee and had secured nearly the whole amount.⁹²

If it was Sheridan's intention to fudge the issue and convince his bishop that he was in the right, it would seem that he was successful on both counts. Woodlock replied to the committee, informing them that he had consulted Sheridan and that the parish priest was quite willing to hand over the monies lodged in the Hibernian Bank, Tullamore. Furthermore, Sheridan would be happy to do so "at any time and in any form, when duly authorised to do so by the committee and subscribers". The bishop went on to admonish the committee members, expressing his surprise that they should have ventured to make such a grave accusation against their P.P. Woodlock maintained that the property could in no sense be said to be in the P.P.'s possession, "for his name is only one in a bank account in which one -or perhaps - two members of your committee are joined with him". Consequently, the bishop concluded rather disingenuously, the serious accusation was "quite groundless".⁹³

It seems quite extraordinary that the bishop should so readily have accepted Sheridan's explanation, given the Canon's proven record of defaulting and the list of complaints already lodged with the bishop. If Woodlock thought that a strong letter from him to the committee was the end of the matter, then he had badly underestimated the strength of feeling which had prompted them to approach the bishop in the first instance. Maloney and his fellow committee members were not deterred and they still wished to know whether they could get their money or not. "Could you not kindly and simply say yes or no?", Maloney inquired, "To us it appears a shabby answer for a Canon and Bishop to give us laymen - to harp on a possible technical mistake of ours and to be rejoicing as it were that Canon Sheridan was not convicted of the grave offence; and still keep our money locked up". He reminded the bishop that he was hearing only "the mild side of this and the kindred subjects as yet" and, repeating the original complaints, he said that they were not yet convinced that it was unnecessary to place the matter in the hands of a solicitor. "It is one more convincing proof to us of Canon Sheridan's determination to make our little town a crossroads", Maloney declared, "We don't consider ourselves in a worse position than we were before".⁹⁴

⁹² Unfinished letter in Sheridan's hand, Ferbane, 1 April 1886, ArdDA.

⁹³ Barth. Woodlock to Maloney, 2 April 1886, (copy), ArdDA.

⁹⁴ Edward Maloney to Woodlock, per Committee, Ferbane, King's Co., 6 April 1886, ArdDA.

Maloney and his committee were well aware, too, of Sheridan's reluctance to pay his debts and, in his outspoken reply, Maloney said that they had felt it their duty to inform the bishop first and he commented: "we did not expect much and we are not disappointed". Then, in a reference to Sheridan's reputation for defaulting, he stated: "It is the first time we ever troubled you or any other bishop and that is more than Canon Sheridan can say". The bishop's letter, he stressed, had damaged their confidence even more. Finally, he had another message for Woodlock when he wrote: "At another time, we think we are entitled to have it placed beyond a particle of doubt that all the money we subscribed for church purposes are correctly vouched for".⁹⁵

Certainly, this forthright reply had the effect of causing Woodlock to think again. Apart from other considerations, he cannot have relished the prospect of Sheridan being forced to answer charges in a civil court, as Maloney's letter had so clearly signalled. On February 11th 1887, the bishop's secretary wrote to say that the bishop would be in Ferbane on the following Sunday, that he would preach at the last mass and that afterwards, he would give his instructions regarding the funds lodged in the bank in the names of Canon Sheridan and Mr. M. Royston.⁹⁶

Simultaneously, there was a letter to the troublesome parish priest, instructing him to make a sum of £62. 35s., the balance of the Fairs and Markets fund, available to the manager of the Hibernian Bank in trust for the committee members. By accepting the trust, these men, "each and every one of them", undertook to hold Sheridan and Royston indemnified should any of the original subscribers object to this arrangement. And, if necessary, the amount of the original subscriptions could be returned to anybody requesting it.⁹⁷

Any consideration of the Fairs and Markets affair must be taken in the context of Sheridan's disputes with individuals and with other bodies such as the local branch of the Irish National League. Woodlock's attempts to defend Sheridan and his apparent reluctance to confront the P.P. can be explained in part by the fact that the bishop himself seemed to be in awe of the arrogant and overbearing parish priest. Also of significance was the fact that Woodlock's own personal views of the activities of bodies such as the Land League and the National League would have been much more in line with the P.P.'s than with the political attitudes of the committee members. It is interesting to note that the bishop's first attempt at a straight 'put down' of the

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Secretary to Lawrence Kennedy, St. Mary's, Athlone, 11 Feb 1887, (copy), ArdDA.

⁹⁷ Barth. Woodlock to Sheridan, 13 Feb 1887, (copy), ArdDA.

protesting members was signally unsuccessful and provoked a sharp, firm and uncompromising riposte. It points to the emergence of an educated, articulate, more assertive middle class townspeople who were not prepared simply to accept without question the dictat of the bishop and parish priest, certainly in political and economic affairs.

From other dioceses, too, comes evidence, though not as detailed, of clerics in difficulties with their finances. Not all of the evidence is wholly reliable as in the case of a Dr. Smith of Kilmore diocese. Having heard that Smith might be appointed coadjutor bishop of that diocese, a man called Curran wrote to Rev. M. O'Farrell, a Jesuit, to protest. Curran alleged, among other things, that Smith was £500 in debt and that he had voted for a curate to whom he owed £50 to be appointed to a parish.⁹⁸

More trustworthy is the evidence in the case of William McKeogh of Ballinahinch, Newport, in Cashel diocese. Having received an admonition for his financial mismanagement from Archbishop Croke, McKeogh wrote to apologise for his debts. He claimed that he had spent all the money in building schools, churches and the parochial house. He had raised a loan of £150 from his sister and, having settled a dispute with his former parish priest, he had been paid the dues owed him. His father was living with him and, if he were to be moved, all his possessions, including furniture, house and cattle, would "go for nothing" from him. "I am in a most abject state of mind", he ended.⁹⁹

In November 1886, Edmund Ryan wrote to Croke to tell him that McKeogh, the Adm. of Solohead and Ulla planned to sell out £5000 worth of consolidated stock at 3% to pay off his debts and that he wished to make some provision for his sister.¹⁰⁰ The more interesting part of this story is that the Adm. of Solohead and Ulla had so much consolidated stock to sell. By 1887, McKeogh was still not solvent and he was obliged to answer a questionnaire about parish finances and his debts. In reply to the question about debts owing in Ballinahinch and Killoscully, he stated that £312 was the amount owing in Ballinahinch and £65 in Killoscully. He listed the conditions in each case and the amounts owing to individuals.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ P. Curran to M. O'Farrell, S.J., Ballinamore, 5 March 1863, DDA.

⁹⁹ W. McKeogh to Croke, Ballinahinch, Newport, Co. Tipperary, 1 March 1878, CDA.

¹⁰⁰ Edmund Ryan to Croke, Solohead, 23 Nov 1881, CDA.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Croke to McKeogh, The Palace, Thurles, 14 March 1887, (copy), CDA.

Conclusion

Attempts were made by the Synod of Thurles to address the problems posed by acquisitive clerics. All were encouraged to adopt a modest lifestyle and the growing concern about the accumulation of property and particularly farms of land by priests was reflected in the framing of statutes which specifically stated that no priest was allowed to hold a farm of more than fifteen acres. It was with a view to maintaining control and establishing accountability that other statutes were introduced, including those already referred to which obliged priests to keep accounts and to make returns of church property. In this category, too, can be included those statutes which required that all property should be properly vested in the church authorities and those requiring priests to make wills.¹⁰² It may be that the statute limiting holdings of land did lead, at least, to an increased awareness on the part of priests who would like to have become farmers but, as has been shown, there were many who simply ignored the regulations. Similarly, the statute urging a modest clerical lifestyle received scant regard from Fr. Healy of Little Bray and his ilk. Again, as in the case of the laws dealing with the problems of alcohol abuse, there was the vacuum between the framing of appropriate legislation and its implementation. Bishops found it difficult to deal effectively even with those who, in the most flagrant manner, violated the spirit and letter of the laws. Many of the bishops themselves led lives that could scarcely be described as modest, for how could James Ryan, bishop of Limerick - he of the £35,000 - lecture his clergy on the impropriety of amassing undue amounts of wealth and property.

It is interesting to note that, twenty years later, there was concern expressed in Rome about the spirit of avarice among the Irish clergy.¹⁰³ The matter was raised in January 1869 by Henry Edward Manning, archbishop of Westminster, with the *minutante* or undersecretary for British and Irish affairs at the Propaganda, Achilles Rinaldini. In particular, Manning referred to parish priests who had extorted offerings from the faithful for the administration of the sacraments. Rinaldini consulted the well known Irish Dominican preacher, Thomas Burke, and Vincent Grotti, the procurator of the Passionist Order in Rome, who had served in a Passionist house in Dublin for seven years. Burke, in his submission, attempted to put the problem in its historical perspective by pointing out that the Catholic church had always been dependent on the voluntary offerings of the people. This system, Burke thought, while it had great advantages for Ireland, had its dangers, "and among these the greatest would be the

¹⁰² *Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae*, MDCCCL.

¹⁰³ For what follows, I am indebted to Professor Emmet Larkin, who made available to me an unpublished article entitled, The Problem of Irish Clerical Avarice in the Nineteenth Century.

spirit of avarice that naturally tends to develop in the clergy". "It is certain", Burke observed, "that it is very common in Ireland to find among the clergy a great love of wealth. For a country so poor, it is surprising the number of ecclesiastics who become rich and who possess farms, cattle and bank accounts". Burke considered it to be the most prevalent vice among the Irish clergy and he stated that, although the amount of offerings on the occasion of the administration of sacraments had been fixed, it was not always observed. "It would not even be inappropriate", he concluded, "to suggest to the Bishops a little more rigor in dealing with those whom they find too exacting".

The memorandum submitted by Vincent Grotti referred both to the regular clergy and to the secular clergy. In his comments on the secular clergy, he concentrated on the abuses associated with the administration of the sacraments and the exorbitant and unnecessary fees demanded by some priests. He also referred to the disedifying practice in some dioceses of priests placing the collecting plate on the coffins at funerals. "If the parish priest fears or foresees that he may receive little in the said way, then he settles before the removal of the corpse from the house, and if the relatives of the deceased do not agree to the pecuniary demand of the parish priest, the corpse remains a long time in the house, or not being taken directly to the church, is conducted to the grave".

Commenting on this evidence, Professor Larkin argues that the two clerical critics failed to take account of the changes in Irish society and in the Irish church between the years 1850 and 1870. In the twenty years after the Synod of Thurles, a whole new plant was provided with the building of churches, houses, convents, institutions and schools. At the same time, there was an enormous expansion in the numbers of Catholic clergy. Since the Irish church was a voluntary association, most of the capital and the operating expenses had to be raised from the resources of the people. This, Larkin maintains, was the real reason for the "continual importuning" and "shameless begging" on the part of the clergy during this period. Burke and Grotti failed to make the distinction between clerical avarice and institutional clerical avarice, as the number of collections being taken up in churches seemed endless. The personal greed of individual priests became more intolerable and was even more bitterly resented by bishops and parish priests who were responsible for financing the burgeoning needs of the institutional church.

Larkin further argues that the two critics not only mistook the thrust of clerical avarice after 1850 but also its nature, claiming that they failed to take account of long-term demographic and economic factors that were transforming Irish society. The huge

increase in the Catholic population between 1800 and 1847 had led to a clergy that was income rich and a church that was capital poor. This changed in the post-Famine years and the drastic reduction in the Catholic population led to a reduction in clerical income, which was further eroded by the increase in the cost of living as prices rose by about 15% between 1852 and 1860. As the Catholic population decreased, there was a considerable increase in the numbers of Catholic clergy. Thus, there were more demands on less income and Larkin estimates that clerical income fell by 30% and more in the remoter areas. The response of the secular priests in the face of this reduction in income was to increase the prices paid for their services. Finally, Larkin maintains that by the 1870's the bishops had managed to redress the more serious aspects of the problem and that by the 1880's the problem of institutional avarice had eclipsed that of individual priests.

There are a number of difficulties with this argument, as there generally are with arguments that are presented with a good deal of hindsight. In the first instance, Burke and Grotti were asked for their observations on what was perceived as a growing problem. They dealt specifically with the worst manifestations of the problem, and while Burke did attempt to offer some explanations, both critics were concerned with the fact of clerical avarice rather than with the reasons for it. There are difficulties, too, with the distinction that Larkin draws between clerical avarice and institutional clerical avarice, as if the institution had a life of its own distinct from its members. For the donor, it was a matter of giving, much and often, and for those who were critical of the constant appeals, such a distinction was a pretty fine one. It was also true that priests who had a talent for collecting money were almost certainly as effective in accumulating personal wealth as they were in managing the finances of the institution.

As regards the point about the effects of emigration and the increased cost of living on clerical income, Larkin's figure of a 30% decrease in clerical income does not stand up to closer scrutiny. It is true in the case of the rural parish of Killenummery in Ardagh diocese, where there was a decrease in income, falling from a high of £486 in 1873 to £336 in 1880, a decrease of 31%.¹⁰⁴ In the same diocese, the income of the parish of Rynagh and Gallen fell from £547 a year in 1877 to £455 in 1880, a drop of 17%.¹⁰⁵ The parish of Monaghan in the diocese of Clogher, however, witnessed a substantial increase from £322 a year in 1873 to £616 a year in 1880, which represents an increase of over 100%.¹⁰⁶ There is simply not sufficient evidence to support the

¹⁰⁴ Returns from Killenummery parish, 1873, 1880, ArdDA.

¹⁰⁵ Returns from the parish of Rynagh and Gallen, 1877, 1880, ArdDA.

¹⁰⁶ Returns from the parish of Monaghan, 1873, 1880, Clogher Diocesan Papers, NIPRO Belfast.

general decrease of about 30% or more as estimated by Larkin. The increase in offerings demanded by some priests may have been a result of their fears arising from a fall in income. Equally, it may be due to the avarice of individual priests wishing to maintain a high standard of living and to add to their personal affluence. Also it must be pointed out that, while there were occasional complaints about excessive demands on the occasion of marriages, baptisms and funerals, the real problem was the obsessive interest of some priests in acquiring a personal fortune, whether by investing in the stock market or by the purchase of houses and farms.

The problem of avarice, whether institutional or individual, remained to the end of the century. The problem was again addressed at the Synod of Maynooth in 1875. Priests were forbidden from becoming executors of lay wills without the consent of their ordinary and the bishop's permission was also required before they could act as guarantors in money matters, contract debts or authorise parish collections. They were obliged to keep accounts of offerings received and other statutes were renewed such as that which obliged them to make a will and deposit a copy with the bishop.¹⁰⁷ These renewed efforts were not entirely successful in resolving the problem as a study of clerical wills show clearly that individual priests continued to accumulate serious amounts of wealth and property right up to the century's end. Legislating for problems, even with the threat of ecclesiastical censures, was limited in its effect, particularly in the case of a problem like avarice which defied precise definition.

What does emerge from a consideration of this matter is the extraordinary willingness of the people to contribute to the upkeep of clergy and church. Right through the half century, the people continued to meet the demands made upon them and, for the most part, they did so without complaint. Even in a case such as that of Patrick Sheridan of Ferbane, where there was blatant misuse of funds, there were representations to his superior to take action and only when the bishop refused to act was there any threat of taking the matter to another forum by way of civil action. It is quite astonishing, too, that a priest like Michael Butler could perpetrate a series of fraudulent activities over a number of years without being forced to face civil action, eventually being visited with the threat of ecclesiastical censure as a last resort. There was never a hint that the people in these cases would invoke the ultimate threat and withdraw all support or resort to violent protest, as had happened at times in the pre-Famine church.¹⁰⁸ The people had undoubtedly, and for the most part unquestioningly, accepted the obligation of supporting their clergy financially. It had

¹⁰⁷ *Acta et Decreta Synodi Plenariae Episcoporum Hiberniae apud Maynutiam*, MDCCCLXXV.

¹⁰⁸ cf. S.J. Connolly, **Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland**, (Dublin 1982), pp.243-52.

become a matter of faith, a point that is proved by the extraordinary expansion of the building programme of the Catholic church and the unstinting generosity of the faithful over the years 1850 to the end of the century.

It was inevitable really in projects often involving large amounts of money that some priests should lose their way. For some of them, it was clearly a case of inexperience and lack of financial expertise leading to a situation which they could no longer control. The case of Michael Patterson of Enniskerry, discussed elsewhere,¹⁰⁹ shows a man out of his depth, struggling to cope by borrowing money to repay debts. Thus he found himself caught in a vicious circle of repeated borrowing and unwise investments in an attempt to meet outstanding parochial debts.

In the case of priests like Butler and Sheridan, one can only conclude that it was their avarice and their personal interest in accumulating wealth that led them to exploit parishioners in the most shameless and unsavoury fashion. If the definition of avarice is confined to the activities of men like Butler and Sheridan, then it was not a major problem for the nineteenth century church. If, however, the definition is widened to include the accumulation of excessive and unnecessary wealth, then the problem was of more significant proportions and it must be said that it was the activities of such avaricious clerics which fed the popular perception of priests as men who had an excessive interest in collecting and hoarding money.

¹⁰⁹ cf. chapter 5, *Financial Management*, pp.145-9.

Chapter Ten

Relations with the Laity

The image of the nineteenth century priest as a tyrannical figure, ruling his flock with a rod of iron or, more literally, a blackthorn, is one that is frequently found in the literature of the time. It is an image that is resented and refuted as being 'stage Irish'. While, of course, it is not generally representative, this depiction of the arrogant, overbearing priest does have some foundation in reality and a perusal of the correspondence in the diocesan archives reveals a clerical caste which was certainly not lacking in self-confidence, conscious of its position of power and influence and secure and confident in the exercise of that power. Indeed, even clerical commentators of the time would readily concede that the Catholic priesthood was an office of power and influence. For instance, M. O'Connor S.J., in an article published in 1869 entitled 'Soggarth Aroon', writes: "The Irish priest thus holds and exercises much power, which confessedly is not inherent in his office. It grew out of his peculiar position and that of his people and he holds it by a title which republicans, at least, should not dispute; he holds it through the free consent of those over whom it is exercised".¹

Archdeacon James Redmond, a parish priest at Arklow in Dublin diocese in the 1850's and 1860's was a man who was very conscious of his position and status. Redmond was a prolific letter-writer and he kept his archbishop, Paul Cullen, fully briefed on all happenings in his own and neighbouring parishes. In Redmond's case, the picture that emerges is that of an opinionated, arrogant person, fully aware of his position of power and influence and resentful of any individual or group who might offer a challenge to that position. Nothing could be more eloquent than Redmond's definition of his role as parish priest. Writing to Cullen, he offers the following example of his effectiveness and his style of ministry: "Take a specimen of the kind of work I have been doing off and on for the last forty years in this parish", he told the archbishop, "On the fair night of the 15th, I hunted two strumpets out of the town and made two young men their companions go on their knees and promise to shun them and give up all strong drink; made two bad husbands promise to treat their wives properly and go to confession, and thrashed a young villain who had struck his father and would not go to sleep. I threatened an old tradesman that if he did not go to Mass

¹ M. O'Connor S.J., *Soggarth Aroon*, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, v, 1869, pp.563-4.

and confession I would allow no man in the parish to employ him, a threat which has had more effect on him than the fear of hell fire".

Redmond goes on to contrast this view of the priestly role with what he sees as his more refined colleagues in the city of Dublin, as he writes: "If the polite and well dressed priests of Dublin - so graceful in the Pulpit and who would not mention Hell to ears polite, so welcome at the dinner table and so accomplished in the drawing room... I say if they acted as above, Dublin would not be as it is the most scandalous city in Europe". The archdeacon was under the impression that international difficulties, too, could be resolved by having recourse to the same coercive tactics - "I am in a towering passion with the villain Napoleon. If I had him within reach I would flog him black with a heavy horsewhip. He has done more mischief than any man that ever lived".²

It might appear that Redmond's style and perception of the role of priesthood were singular but there are sufficient examples to demonstrate that the underlying attitudes were quite common. Certainly they were shared by Daniel Magee of the diocese of Raphoe, whose aggressive behaviour was the subject of a special investigation by the bishop. According to one report, Magee had rushed into the house of James McDevitt of Glenties, with whom he was in dispute. When he was told that McDevitt was in bed upstairs, Magee "took off his coat and put it aside, went to the room where James McDevitt was in bed and immediately began his assault upon him. James was in a stupor of intoxication and able to offer no resistance". The report then continued: "Father Magee rushed upon him with great fury striking him about the body and in the course of the attack dragging him out of the bed on to the ground and there belabouring him savagely with fist...." A servant man, who heard the noise of the blows and McDevitt's appeals for help, went to the room to intervene but Magee "turned upon him and kicked him badly in the legs".³

In Ardagh diocese, there were complaints about Dr. Thomas Langan, a curate in Mohill, who was alleged to have physically abused a parishioner. In a letter to the bishop, Bartholomew Woodlock, a parishioner, Francis Mulvey, complained that he was the object of an attack by the curate. Mulvey alleged that Langan had assaulted him violently in the streets of Mohill and that he had been called offensive names. The complainant assured the bishop that he did not wish to institute criminal proceedings

² Jas. Redmond to Cullen, Arklow, 24 Nov [1875], DDA.

³ Document dated Winter of 1874, giving details of investigation of the behaviour of Fr. Magee, RDA.

against the curate. He called on Woodlock to investigate Langan's conduct, saying that this was the second time that he had been subjected to such an attack.⁴

The defence offered by Langan is revealing in that the priest does not question his right to query Mulvey's behaviour and his political opinions. When requested to provide an explanation, Langan stated that the first time he had encountered the complainant, Mulvey was under the influence of alcohol and that, when Langan asked him to go home quietly, Mulvey had spoken "disrespectfully about the Leitrim priests". Langan claimed that he had information that Mulvey was a member of a secret society, as he had been observed attending "night meetings" in the parish. On meeting Mulvey a second time, Langan had asked him why he had told an untruth, saying that he would follow the matter up. To which Mulvey replied, "I dare you". Later that day, Langan stated, he was accosted by Mulvey and the curate said that he would not listen as Mulvey was "a drunken rascal". Langan repeated that Mulvey was a drunkard and "a party man", whereupon Mulvey shouted, "You're a liar". Langan then admitted that he struck Mulvey twice on the cheek with his open hand and he then went inside. "If he were drunk at the time, I would have excused him but he was not", was Langan's justification of his action.⁵

Patrick Sheridan, the notorious parish priest of Ferbane, was another who had no qualms about resorting to strong-arm tactics in his dealings with parishioners who opposed him. Sheridan's difficulties arising from his dubious financial transactions have been discussed elsewhere, as have his problems with his curates.⁶ The laity did not fare too well either and a particular target were those townspeople who supported the Irish National League, an organisation to which the parish priest was implacably opposed.

Over the years 1886-88, the P.P. fought a running battle with committee members of the local branch of the National League. First to complain was C.W. Hackett, who described himself as "the only Presbyterian on the Committee of the Ferbane National League". Hackett alleged that Sheridan had tried to defame him by calling him "a Castle hack", since he was in receipt of government money. Also, according to Hackett, Sheridan had told one of his supporters to stick Hackett with a fork if he entered a particular house. Hackett said that he could not understand the motives of the parish priest in attacking him, as he had always been on good terms with

⁴ Francis Mulvey to Woodlock, Gort, Dromod, 14 Jan [1881], ArdDA.

⁵ Thomas Langan C.C. to Woodlock, Mohill, 21 Jan 1881, ArdDA.

⁶ cf. Chapter 9, Problems of Discipline - Clerical Avarice; Chapter 2, Parish Priests and Curates.

the Catholic priests of the parish. He also threatened that, if Woodlock did not take action against the P.P., he would have to seek satisfaction elsewhere. "There is no peace in the parish since he came into it as he cannot get on with his people", Hackett remarked, predicting that Woodlock would receive further complaints.⁷

Hackett was correct in his prediction, as this letter was followed shortly by one from Kieran Ferley, who complained about Sheridan's behaviour towards him in a public hotel. Ferley alleged that Sheridan had attacked a Mr. and Mrs. Royston and when Ferley went to their defence, Sheridan threatened him with a stick - "and it was the wonder of those standing by he did not go further". The writer then described Sheridan as "opposed to everything national" and stated that the parish priest's only friends were "the landlords and landowners".⁸

There then followed a document from the Ferbane Branch of the National League, giving the details of a number of resolutions passed by the Branch. Sheridan was condemned for his support of the landlords of the country, for "slandering and terrorising" the members of the committee and for accusing committee members of being in league with "the infamous Dublin Castle". A copy of the resolutions had been sent to Sheridan and, in a covering letter to the bishop, the secretary stated that, since Sheridan had been made aware of the resolutions, he had visited every member of the committee "with the argument of the cudgel".⁹

Two days later, there arrived a long letter from Daniel Meakle, another committee member, who complained that, having returned to his native parish after three years in London, he found that the people were afraid to talk to him. He gave an instance of being accosted on the street by Sheridan, who "had recourse to the *argumentum bacculinum* in the shape of an ominous blackthorn stick and swore thrice that he would beat me and kick me home". He alleged that the P.P. had accused him of coming over from London to corrupt his people and that he had not attended church since coming home. Meakle then continued: "I have now performed the most unpleasant duty which has ever fallen to my lot; the duty of myself appealing to you, as my Lord Bishop, for protection from slander and scurrility from one who should be an example of Christian virtue, the most painful duty of accusing my P.P. of the acts of blasphemy, scandal and lies".¹⁰

⁷ C.W. Hackett to Woodlock, Rossfarahan, Ferbane, 7 Feb 1886, ArdDA.

⁸ Kieran Ferley to Woodlock, Ferbane, 8 Feb 1886, ArdDA.

⁹ L. Furlong, Hon. Sec., to Woodlock, Ferbane, 9 Feb 1886, ArdDA.

¹⁰ Daniel C. Meakle to Woodlock, Ferbane, 10 Feb 1886, ArdDA.

As he had done in the case of other complaints about the parish priest of Ferbane, Woodlock decided not to take any immediate action. The committee of the National League waited for a month and, when no reply was forthcoming from the bishop, the secretary wrote again to express the anxiety of the members and to request Woodlock to ignore the false representation that had been made regarding their motives and their status as a representative body. The secretary then issued a warning to the effect that, in the event of no episcopal response being offered, they were holding a meeting to consider what further action should be taken.¹¹

Apparently, this did bring a reply, as in his next letter, Lawrence Furlong, the secretary, declared that the committee was glad that Woodlock considered the National League a lawful association "for the political and social welfare of our native land". Furlong then went on to complain about attacks on him by Canon Sheridan - "He came into my house, knocked the hat off my head and when I resented it, my poor sister was outrageously slapped on the face because she came to make peace". More seriously for Woodlock, Furlong wrote: "Canon Sheridan says he is independent of his bishop, he does not care for you, we do not see why we should care for him". He also informed Woodlock that another letter which he had written to Sheridan had been sent to the P.P.'s attorney. Appealing to the bishop to come to their aid, Furlong pleaded: "I am not a good speaker or writer, my Lord, but I am convinced the occasion and subject justifies me".¹²

Again, as had happened in the Fairs and Markets affair, the bishop chose to come to the defence of the parish priest. He wrote a most disingenuous letter to Furlong, in which he declared that Sheridan was not at all pleased with the secretary. In Sheridan's opinion, Furlong had "forgotten the good lesson" he had learned in the excellent Catholic college where he had studied. Sheridan denied having made any attacks on Furlong or his sister. Woodlock informed Furlong that he would be visiting Ferbane shortly and the complainant would have the opportunity of substantiating "these very grave charges". "That it will afford me much pleasure to see you on that occasion", wrote the bishop, before neatly switching the focus of his letter, "if you are able to inform me, that this unhappy difference with your P.P. is settled satisfactorily, when I learn from him, that on the score of your religious observance you give him no cause of complaint".¹³

¹¹ L. Furlong, Hon. Sec., to Woodlock, Irish National League, Ferbane, 26 March 1886, ArdDA.

¹² Lawrence Furlong to Woodlock, Ferbane, 31 March 1886, ArdDA.

¹³ Barth. Woodlock to Furlong, 5 April 1886, (copy), ArdDA.

Whether Furlong was able to substantiate the charges or satisfy his P.P. with regard to the observance of his religious duties, we know not, but the complaints about Sheridan's behaviour continued. Next came Matthew Cantwell, the president of the branch of the National League. He claimed the distinction of being the very first to have been attacked by Sheridan. "For what reason he opposed the League first is unknown to me", Cantwell commented, "he having 86 acres of land from the three neighbouring landlords well stocked with horses, cattle and sheep and he pledged himself to them to grind a rackrent from his parishioners, which his acts show he was inclined to carry out if he could". Cantwell then gave details of various attacks by Sheridan on committee members and he told how Sheridan had returned the Easter dues sent by Cantwell, saying that no offerings from him would be accepted.¹⁴

By this time, Woodlock was beginning to show more concern about the state of affairs in Ferbane parish. He told Sheridan that he had heard that "things were going from bad to worse" and that some people were saying that, having referred matters to the bishop and no action having been taken, they would now take matters into their own hands. The bishop then requested replies to a number of specific questions, such as whether people avoided the P.P.'s mass on Sunday and if there had been notices placed around the town urging people to make no offerings at Easter. The bishop wished to know if Sheridan had received only two shillings at a funeral which should have yielded £15 and he also had queries about the farms and the cattle said to be in Sheridan's possession "contrary to the decrees of Maynooth".¹⁵

It was unlikely that the arrogant and irascible parish priest would be intimidated by these queries. It was much more likely that he would reply to the bishop as he had always done, stoutly denying all charges and instead, accusing his accusers. The next dispatch from a committee member to the bishop told of a meeting of the opponents of the National League to be held in the chapel yard. The meeting was being called by Sheridan and Woodlock was warned that, if this meeting were to be held, it would end "in disgrace to the cause of religion and nationality" in the parish. Once more, the writer, D. C. Meakle, begged of the bishop to intervene as he feared there would be an outbreak of violence.¹⁶

The meeting was held and, as Meakle had predicted, it led to strife in the parish. "I allude to the Very Reverend Canon Sheridan, our P.P.", Meakle reported, "On his

¹⁴ Matthew Cantwell to Woodlock, Kilcolgan, 15 May 1886, ArdDA.

¹⁵ B. Woodlock to Sheridan, Longford, 15 May 1886, (copy), ArdDA.

¹⁶ D. C. Meakle to Woodlock, Ferbane Committee, 14 July 1886, ArdDA.

head alone rests the grave responsibility of the fact that the life of at least one man hangs in the balance and that two of the quietest and more respectable young men in the parish now await their trial in Tullamore jail". According to Meakle, "an organised mob of rowdies", about 35 in number and led by three of "Canon Sheridan's Committee", savagely attacked four men in the vicinity of their own homes. Meakle felt that the four would have been killed except for the intervention of three of their comrades who had come to their assistance. Meakle now looked to Woodlock "for peace and justice" and he reminded the bishop of his responsibility in the matter, stating: "We could all along foresee the sad result of Canon Sheridan's stupidity; but you have decided to ignore our communication with the result that there has fallen on this district a disgrace to religion and morality which could have been easily averted by Your Lordship's kindly intervention". In the strongest language yet, the angry Meakle threatened that Sheridan might have to face a court action - "there may be no other alternative, as it is difficult to deal leniently with such a consummate hypocrite".¹⁷

By May of 1887, matters in the parish of Ferbane were not any more settled and there followed yet another letter of complaint from the committee of the National League. This time, there were complaints not only about the conduct of the parish priest but also of his curate, Bernard Magivney. It was alleged that the curate had used abusive language at the Sunday masses, describing the committee members as "Free Masons, communists and socialists". The complainants objected to this "red smear", saying: "When we go to Mass, are we to listen to the priest comparing us to the reds of Paris". Needless to say, there were additional complaints about Sheridan, who, according to the letter, had the parish "at present on the brink of civil war". It was stated, too, that Sheridan had attacked a "respectable man" at a funeral the previous week. There were complaints also about Sheridan's supporters, one of whom, in a drunken state, had "shouted through a large market that there was Canon Sheridan and to hell with Ferbane". Finally, the committee requested Woodlock, if he were not prepared to deal with Sheridan, at least to force Magivney to apologise for his language or to send them a curate who would not allow himself to be "a mouthpiece of Canon Sheridan".¹⁸

The year 1888 opened with a letter to the bishop from twelve Ferbane parishioners. Some of the complaints were familiar, including reported attacks on committee members from the altar and the refusal by the parish priest to accept their offerings. "Now, my Lord, we are arrived at the final test", the letter continued, "He

¹⁷ D. C. Meakle to Woodlock, Ferbane Committee I.N.L., 20 July 1886, ArdDA.

¹⁸ Committee members to Woodlock, Ferbane, 7 May 1887, ArdDA.

publicly declared at first mass on last Sunday that he would not, nor would he allow his assistant, to attend any of us, that he should have his revenue, that the Bishop had no control over him and that we should keep from going into the chapel". They then asked the bishop for permission to go to Canon Monahan's parish and pay dues there.¹⁹

Woodlock was forced at least to be seen to investigate the complaints and, having met with a deputation from the parish, he requested them to make a written statement. This document contained some further allegations about the parish priest and his management of parish finances. The first complaint was that Sheridan had doubled the usual subscriptions at Easter and Christmas to purchase second hand seats in Dublin and nothing had been heard of them afterwards. After a year, another cess was raised for the same purpose. Eventually, Sheridan agreed to purchase fifty seats at 15s. each, amounting to £37. 10s. and the parishioners now wished to know what had become of the balance of the money collected. Likewise, Sheridan had collected money to raise a memorial over the grave of his predecessor, Mark O'Farrell. Again the subscriptions had been doubled and again nothing had happened. "Let your Lordship look at his grave", said the letter, "it is presently stuffed with deal boards and it is dangerous to walk on".

There was concern expressed, too, about a sum of £600 which had been left to Mark O'Farrell towards the erection of a new chapel in the town. This money, which had been lodged at a bank in Moate during O'Farrell's time, had been removed by Sheridan, on his own admission, and the parishioners now wished to know for what purpose it was being applied. Then, there were references to the farms being held by Sheridan - in all, seven of them, amounting to 85 acres, it was said. There followed complaints about the state of religion in the parish - "Are our children to grow up with their minds poisoned with the scandals of this place..?" the complainants asked. The statement then continued: "We don't know what we have done to deserve such a scourge except we made him too rich and independent and in consequence we are treated with scorn and ingratitude". There were repeated complaints about offerings being returned and then parishioners' names being read from the altar as non-subscribers. They believed that this was done publicly to injure certain business people in the town and they concluded: "We are aware that in private he does much more injury than you are aware. Considering all these things, we respectfully beg your Lordship to try to remedy these evils".²⁰

¹⁹ Letter signed by twelve men to Woodlock, Fermagh, 12 Jan 1888, ArdDA.

²⁰ Unsigned document, Fermagh, dated 12 Jan 1888, ArdDA.

Despite this strong statement, Sheridan continued in his position of parish priest of Ferbane. The final letter relating to his activities came from a group of nine men from the Kilcolgan area of the parish. Their particular complaint referred to a school which was to have been built there, but, the letter went on, "owing to circumstances not unknown to your Lordship and the position he has placed himself in with regard to his parishioners we are debarred from asking him to apply for a grant to have a school erected". The parishioners appealed to Woodlock as the "great patron and encourager of education in Ardagh diocese" to intervene and see that a school be erected.²¹

One must assume that so many and such serious allegations would, at least, have earned Sheridan a strong rebuke from his bishop. Beyond that, there is no evidence that any stronger action was taken as Sheridan remained as P.P. of Ferbane up to his death in March 1899, four years after Woodlock had resigned as bishop of Ardagh. In all the correspondence dealing with Sheridan, there is a definite impression of a bishop who is most reluctant to confront the domineering parish priest. It should be said, too, that it would be most unfair to the clergy of Ardagh in the nineteenth century to portray Patrick Sheridan as the typical parish priest. The picture presented here must be balanced by reference to parish priests like Thomas Cahill and, in particular, Patrick Reddy of Keadue, who showed themselves sensitive to the hardships being endured by their parishioners and who took an active part in defending tenants from overbearing landlords. But for all priests, whether overbearing or kindly, there was a strong underlying conviction of their right to intervene in all matters pertaining to their parishioners.

The alleged propensity of the P.P. of Ferbane for publicly denouncing people from the altar was a fault which he shared with other priests, as is evident from the complaining letters in the diocesan archives. In Dublin, for instance, in 1862, Fr. M. O'Rorke, a curate at Blackditches, wrote to Cullen to defend himself against such a charge. His defence was a strange one in that he justified his behaviour by pointing to the substantial collections and then drawing this fine distinction: "As a minister of God, I never in my life cursed any one but I did threaten vengeance and the great anger of God on the sacrilegious and public sinner". He had no doubt but that there were sinful characters in the parish and, as regards the land quarrels between a man called Brady and himself, he likened them to the quarrel between the Pope and Victor Emmanuel, declaring that Brady was the aggressor.²²

²¹ Letter signed by nine men, Kilcolgan, Ferbane, 15 Feb 1888, ArdDA.

²² M. O'Rorke to Cullen, Blackditches, 11 Jan 1862, DDA.

Altar denunciations were often politically motivated and priests, for instance, who denounced landlords or their agents, as happened frequently during the land agitation, were sure to be reported to church authorities. In a letter written in 1855 in defence of his clergy to Cardinal Frasoni of Propaganda, Archbishop Slattery of Cashel stated: "It is almost impossible for priests in Ireland to abstain completely from secular affairs, on account of the misery of their flocks and the injustices of the English government and the landlords; there is an urgent need to change many laws to suit the Catholics who are in the majority in the country".²³

Not all members of the hierarchy were prepared to take so sanguine a view and one, in particular, Edward McCabe of Dublin, opposed the Land League and priests who supported its activities in a manner that bordered on the obsessive. McCabe, in fact, was not just concerned with the activities of his own clergy but saw his role as watchdog for the clergy nationwide. Because of his opposition to Parnell and the Land League, McCabe was seen as a "castle" bishop. In McCabe's case, the title would appear to have been particularly apt, as the Dublin archives contain several police reports, which were made available to him on the presumption that he would either take action against the offending priest himself or that he would force the priest's superior to take action.

From the diocese of Meath, for instance, McCabe received a report on the activities of Rev. J. Tynan, who was accused of supporting "boycotting" activities. According to the police report, Land League meetings were being held under the guise of "dancing parties" and after they had cautioned the participants, the police were denounced by Tynan as "minions of the government". Tynan was alleged to have advised the people to purchase the Land League catechism and to have said to the police, "I wish your Sergeant was here, I would tell him more to his face". The report ended: "Owing to this gentleman's action, the Police experience the greatest difficulty in discharging their duties in the district".²⁴

Similarly, a report was forwarded to McCabe about the conduct of Rev. J. Rock of Armagh diocese. Rock was described in the report as "a violent, desperate man", who was "going about warning the people not to pay rent until Parnell is released". The priest was also accused of influencing the tenants in their attitudes towards landlords and bailiffs and of denouncing the landed gentry from the altar - "even naming them and inciting the people to boycott them if not worse". The curate

²³ Michael Slattery to Frasoni, Thurles, 7 April 1855, (copy), CDA.

²⁴ Police report, Rev. J. Tynan, C.C. of Kilbeg, Co. Meath, DDA.

was accused of leading crowds of people to obstruct the police and process servers. "Up to a fortnight ago, the Rev. Mr. McKee, P.P., was associated with Mr. Rock in this scandalous conduct", the report stated, "but he appears lately to have taken warning".²⁵

Presumably, the reports were sent to McCabe because of his well known antipathy to the activities of the Land League and therefore, the authorities were more hopeful that disciplinary action would be taken against the offending clergymen. McCabe does not seem to have had any reservations about what might have been seen as interference in the affairs of another diocese. As we have seen, this was true even of dioceses outside his metropolitan area, where he might have had a legitimate role. In October 1881, he wrote to William Rhatigan of Crossboyne parish in Tuam diocese in reference to a newspaper report, in which it was claimed that Rhatigan had convened a meeting of the Land League in the chapel. Rhatigan emphatically denied either holding such a meeting in the chapel or using the language attributed to him in the report in the *Irish Times*. He stressed that papers such as the *Daily Telegraph*, which had carried the story, had refused to publish his letters contradicting the reports. This was not surprising, said Rhatigan, seeing that the same papers had refused to print a contradiction from "his Grace of Cashel", hinting no doubt at the public disagreement between McCabe and Croke. "I do not think the English press is so much to be relied upon against an Irish priest", Rhatigan remarked and then he added, "I am unfortunate perhaps in having taken the side of the poor and having done my best, according to my rights for religion. God knows no matter how much I love the poor or hate their oppressors who are also the enemies of our Church, I would not give offence to God or abuse His House to save all Ireland". The indignant curate did admit that he had addressed the people after mass on the Sunday in question but simply to advise the people "to lose no time in trying to save themselves through the L[and] Courts". Rhatigan stated that he felt bound to satisfy the archbishop but was not disposed to believe himself guilty "because the English press calumniates me".²⁶

In his own diocese, as might be expected, McCabe took a strong line with priests who were charged with public denunciation or involvement in politics. Curates so charged were likely to be severely reprimanded or, in some cases, transferred instantly to another parish. James Manning, a curate who was moved from Castledermot to Rathdrum in 1881, took grave exception to the transfer and the reasons for it. He protested that he was not guilty of denouncing people from the altar. He

²⁵ Police report, Conduct of Rev. J. Rock, C.C. of Mulleary, Co. Louth, 31 Oct 1881, DDA.

²⁶ W. Rhatigan to McCabe, Crossboyne, Claremorris, 2 Nov 1881, DDA.

defended himself by saying that, on one occasion, he had simply alluded to "an instance of inhumanity" that had occurred on the estate of the Duke of Leinster, namely, an attempt to evict a widow who was dying. He had also referred to the manner in which Lord Gough, who, on inheriting his uncle's estate, had broken long leases and arbitrarily raised the rents. He had spoken of these incidents because a public meeting had been called to make a protest about them. Manning insisted that he had urged the people to remain calm and not to resort to any "unpleasant behaviour". On another occasion, the curate had discussed the situation in the schools, which he had refused to visit, following a disagreement with the teachers. He admitted that, in this instance, he was guilty of disobeying the instructions of the parish priest. Manning argued that he had been dealt with "somewhat unfairly", especially in that he had been condemned without being given a hearing. He was most unhappy at the way in which he had been treated and he hoped now that McCabe might reconsider. "Oh! Your Grace", he ended dramatically, "be pleased to listen to the piteous appeal of one who may have erred - but remember, not obstinately nor contumaciously!!".²⁷

It would seem that the response from McCabe cannot have been very conciliatory, as in his next letter, the aggrieved curate was applying for an *exeat* from Dublin diocese. When three months later, this request had still not been granted, Manning appealed once more to be released.²⁸ It is clear that the request was refused, as Manning was simply transferred to Blanchardstown, where he was still curate six years later.²⁹

Clearly McCabe's disciplinary measures were causing some resentment among the priests, as is evident from a protesting letter from William Hampson of Celbridge in July 1881. Hampson, even more indignant than Manning, began by declining the appointment to Dunlavin, as well as declining to serve "most assuredly and *most decidedly* one instant *more* in the *Archdiocese*". He described the charges against him as "a stab in the back and emanating from the same source, malignity, insignificance, narrow-minded, empty, vain heads". Like Manning, he was angry that McCabe had pronounced sentence without any reference to the "*audi alteram partem*". As a priest who had served in the diocese for thirty-four years "without a hitch or censure", Hampson resented fiercely the imputation that he had given scandal when preaching. He denied that he had transgressed the law, "unless Langdale's agent, his wife and clique with whom 'Adulation' agrees but not God's word and its solemn and salutary

²⁷ Jas. Manning C.C. to McCabe, Greenane, Rathdrum, 18 Jan 1881, DDA.

²⁸ James Manning C.C. to McCabe, Greenane, Rathdrum, 30 April 1881, DDA.

²⁹ Irish Catholic Directory, 1883, 1887.

(tho' painful to worldlings) and touching lessons". Hampson declared his intention of immediately applying to join the Jesuit order and he requested McCabe to forward the *exeat* as soon as possible.³⁰

It was the politics of the time, too, that brought Patrick Deighan, parish priest of Castledermot, into conflict with his parishioners, particularly those of them involved in the local branch of the National League. The president of the branch, Richard Lalor, was requested to write to Archbishop William Walsh to inform him of Deighan's conduct. The tenants were fighting a hard battle with their landlords, Lalor wrote, and instead of having their priest to help them in their struggle, he had taken part "with their enemy". Lalor then reported how the parish priest had gone to the court in Castledermot and had stated to the magistrates that he was in fear of his life, that he was obliged to keep a man in his house with a loaded rifle to protect him, that he was not afraid to die but that "he would not give the ruffians the satisfaction of murdering him". By ruffians the P.P. meant the members of the National League branch, who, he claimed, had dug a grave at the back of his house. Lalor, describing these statements as "hallucinations", asked the archbishop to take action against Deighan. "The parishioners have lost all hope of redress", he continued, alleging that the curate, Patrick Clarke, had left the parish because he could not live with Deighan. Lalor then described how the P.P. had come into the chapel on the previous Sunday "acting like a buffoon, striking about and stabbing the people with his umbrella". One man had stood up and left the church in protest. The offended Lalor then expressed the hope that the archbishop would not "pass this over so lightly, as you have my former communications which you seemed to have doubted the truth of". He addressed Walsh directly, as he wrote: "Had you taken the trouble to enquire, you would have found out that I never stated anything to you but what was strictly true".³¹

Michael J. Brady, parish priest of Athy, was entrusted with the investigation into the charges advanced by Lalor. In his report, Brady began by remarking that, when he first heard of Deighan's application for police protection, he could scarcely credit it. "I fear our friend is labouring under delusions", was Brady's conclusion, "Indeed I am convinced that no one in his senses could act as he has done of late, and I quite agree with Your Grace that something must be done without delay". Brady then reported that a meeting of the Duke of Leinster's tenants had been called and that Deighan's conduct at a previous meeting was so objectionable that his presence at this one would probably lead to "some serious unpleasantness". Brady agreed that the best

³⁰ W. Hampson to McCabe, The Presbytery, Celbridge, 18 July 1881, DDA.

³¹ Richard Lalor to Walsh, Abbeylands, Castledermot, 18 Jan 1887, DDA.

plan was for Walsh to come in person, accompanied by a vicar general - "I have a good deal to say, which I cannot conveniently put on paper".³²

If Redmond of Dublin and Sheridan of Ardagh had resorted to the use of the stick to exert control and Deighan of Castledermot to the umbrella, Bannon of Armagh was accused of taking even stronger measures. In January 1858, Michael Keirans, a layman, wrote to Archbishop Dixon to complain about Bannon's conduct. According to Keirans, Bannon made arrangements for the baptism of a child at eleven o'clock but when the parties arrived, Bannon sent them away, telling them to return at one o'clock. Keirans went to the P.P.'s house and demanded to know why the child was not being baptised at the appointed time. Then, Keirans stated: "He (Mr. Bannon) ran to strike me. I ran away from him and stood a distance off, he then took up a stone and threw it at me. I took up the stone and told him that I went to the Primate's door before about his conduct towards me and that I would be there in a short time again and would decline delivering my claim against him". When Bannon did finally agree to baptise the child, Keirans offered him half a crown but the P.P. took it and threw it after him. Keirans then listed other instances of neglect of duty on Bannon's part - "Mr. Bannon prefers going to law with parties to the performance of his duties", Keirans remarked, referring to two lawsuits concerning land disputes in which Bannon had been involved.³³

This letter was sent by Dixon to Michael Kieran, P.P. Dundalk, who replied that he had heard that Bannon had indeed thrown a stone at some person and that the actual stone would be kept to be shown to the archbishop at the next conference. Kieran felt that no one would invent such a story about a priest but he added that the writer, Keirans, was not a "person of good temper" and that he had previously clashed with Bannon. For those reasons, Kieran thought that the matter might be exaggerated. "I shall enquire as prudently as I can into the grounds of the different charges made in the letter", Kieran remarked, adding that there were many strange stories in circulation regarding Bannon's conduct. Kieran heard that Bannon had left the altar in the middle of mass and that he would have gone home if some person in the vestry had not told him that he had not finished mass. This report on Bannon ended: "It is however I fear too true that he is in the habit of saying very foolish things from the altar on secular matters".³⁴

³² Michael J. Brady to Walsh, Ballytore, Athy, 21 Jan 1887, DDA.

³³ Michael Keirans Jnr. to Dixon, Corderry, 15 Jan 1858, ArmDA.

³⁴ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 21 Jan 1858, ArmDA.

Other colourful complaints from Armagh included an allegation from a man who claimed he was struck by a priest and that the priest had seized his cravat "as if he wished to choke him".³⁵

There is no doubt but that there were priests who felt quite justified in using the pulpit as a platform to denounce what they saw as sinful behaviour. Edward Dukay, P.P. Moone in Dublin diocese, strongly defended his right to do so, following a complaint to the archbishop by some parishioners. The complainants were owners of public houses and Dukay, denying that he had mentioned any of them from the altar by name, declared himself grateful that he had succeeded in closing their houses on Sunday. He thanked Walsh for forwarding the letter of complaint to him so that he could read it from the altar - "that my people may know all about it". The archbishop had not sealed the envelope properly so it "could be read like a post card". To which Dukay commented: "They shall know then that I broke no statute".³⁶

An unusual complaint was registered against Edward Keogh, parish priest of Kilmore in the diocese of Elphin, in 1861. The complaint was made by members of the constabulary who stated that Keogh had sold one of the seats in the gallery of the chapel. The constables claimed that this seat had been occupied by constabulary members for twenty years and that Keogh had received more than £40 from the constabulary on all subscription days. The constables were annoyed because the seat had been sold to a publican without their knowledge or consent. When Keogh was informed that the matter would be referred to the bishop, he was alleged to have replied that he would not return the seat "to the bishop or any other man".³⁷

"The policemen have misinformed you and grossly misrepresented me", began the trenchant reply from the parish priest. According to Keogh, he had always retained the use of one seat in case a friend or relative should call on a visit and that the constables had permission to use the seat when it was vacant. "I got nothing from them in return save their trivial offerings on Christmas Day and Easter Sunday", Keogh asserted. He had offered the policemen alternative seating, he said, but they had refused - "their impudence would not allow them to accept this offer". The parish priest was now claiming the use of the disputed seat for his niece who was living with

³⁵ M. Kieran to Dixon, Dundalk, 22 March 1861, ArmDA.

³⁶ E. Dukay to Walsh, Moone, 28 July 1891, DDA.

³⁷ Letter signed by four constables to Gillooly; C. MacDonnell to Gillooly, Kilmore, Drumsna, 27 May 1861, EDA.

him and he felt assured that the bishop would not expect him "to place her beside or between policemen".³⁸

The attitude of Richard Colahan, a Dublin priest, towards the laity was markedly different from those mentioned above to judge from a diary which Colahan kept over the years 1888-89. The impression that emerges from the diary is that of a pious sincere individual anxious to fulfil his priestly duties and to observe faithfully his religious obligations. "I spoke harshly to a poor soul already much burdened", he wrote and expressed regret for having dealt somewhat harshly with poor people on other occasions.³⁹ It is clear, too, that Colahan was aware of the sufferings of the poor and he was somewhat critical of the attitude of his fellow priests. "The world abhors a conceited priest", he remarked, adding that he himself did not care for "very fashionable people".⁴⁰ "Today I was a good deal among the poor", he wrote in May 1889, "I always feel consolation in this work"⁴¹ and commenting on the attendance of the clergy at funerals, he remarked: "What a contrast between the attendance of many priests at respectable funerals and their absence from the funerals of the poor".⁴² Colahan's disposition is in marked contrast with the arrogant attitude of Redmond or Sheridan. Speaking of his dealings with poor people, Colahan felt that "No prejudice [but] wisdom, determination and above all kindness are required in dealing with them".⁴³

Conclusion

The virtues recommended by Colahan were too often absent in dealings with the laity. The incidences related here are designed to demonstrate the nature and variety of the complaints lodged by parishioners against their pastors. While one cannot assume that this abrasive, aggressive style was adopted by parish priests in general, the incidents do exhibit an underlying characteristic attitude or mind set. What is evident is that priests of the time did not question what they saw as their inherent right to intervene in the personal lives of the parishioners and that they reacted very strongly when this right was challenged or even when their public actions were queried by lay people. They certainly saw themselves as answerable only to the bishop and even then,

³⁸ E. Keogh P.P. to Gillooly, Kilmore, 30 May 1861, EDA.

³⁹ Fr. Colahan's Diary, 28 Nov 1888; 21 Nov 1888; 20 Dec 1888; published in *Holy Redeemer Church 1792-1992; A Bray Parish*, ed. Brendan O'Cathaoir (Bray 1991).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 20 Dec 1888; 19 May 1889.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 21 May 1889.

⁴² *Ibid.* 29 Jan 1889.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 18 Dec 1888.

as we have seen, some of them resented episcopal rebukes and took their revenge on the informants. What is interesting, too, is the manner in which many lay people responded to what they saw as bullying and tyrannical behaviour. For the most part, it must be assumed, lay people were accepting of the priest's role and even conceded to him the right to interfere in their lives but those who did make formal complaints to the ecclesiastical authorities exhibited a determination to have their cases heard. Their assertiveness and their persistence in pressing their claims demonstrate the growing confidence of a Catholic middle class who would not be dictated to or brushed aside in any condescending manner.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Catholic church could look back on an era of considerable achievements and of significant progress. There was, first of all, the enduring legacy of a comprehensive and systematic building programme, putting in place an impressive network of churches, parochial residences, convents and institutions. The battle for the right to denominational education had been won; the church had taken *de facto* control of the primary system and the second level schools and colleges were well established and well supported. The church was well organised with a disciplined obedient clerical workforce. The statutes of Thurles and other provincial and diocesan synods had produced a code of regulations which provided clear guidelines for those in authority and which enabled them to deal with breaches of discipline. Bishops, in line with the policy advocated by Paul Cullen, were competent administrators and the hierarchy had been moulded into an organised effective unit with much to say in all areas of contemporary Irish life.

In their relations with the laity, the priests speak and act with the confidence of people who are in charge and who brook no opposition. There is a unity of purpose and a unity of mission. Their title has been established and they are ready to defend it. The Irish Catholic church became a clerical church, in which the bishops and priests occupied the central positions of power and control. This was accepted by the laity, as is evidenced by the willingness with which they made their contributions, answering every call. And the laity did so, above all, because the Catholic church was important to them. They did so from a sense of duty and certainly because it was a matter of faith.⁴⁴ They were now well instructed in the tenets of their faith and church ritual and ceremonies formed an integral part of the fabric of Irish Catholic life, rural and urban. The clergy, because of the increase in their numbers and because of the improvements in their own education and training, preached their gospel with greater effectiveness and

⁴⁴ On this point, cf. S.J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland*, (Dublin 1982), pp. 272-8.

they succeeded, with the unequivocal support of the laity, in establishing a place for their church at the heart of Irish life.

All of this new found confidence bred resentment. Although the role of the Catholic church in the politics of the time is not included in this study, the Catholic church's very active involvement in nineteenth century politics inevitably brought adverse comment and criticism. Judge Keogh's extraordinary outburst at the Galway by-election petition trial of 1872 was a statement of the resentment being felt at the position of pre-eminence now being filled by Catholic clergy. It was a position, however, which was to be jealously guarded and criticism, from whatever source, would not remain unchallenged. There was a storm of protest across the country, from clerics and lay people, in the wake of Keogh's anti-clerical tirade⁴⁵

One man who did put his head over the ramparts was Horace Plunkett, a member of the Church of Ireland and the pioneer of the Irish co-operative movement. In his book, **Ireland in the New Century**, published in 1904, Plunkett had some mild criticisms to offer. Plunkett's observations were by no means original but he might have been more circumspect in the manner in which they were made. In a chapter on the influence of religion in Ireland, Plunkett referred to what he called the "anti-economic tendencies" of Roman Catholicism and then went on to say that these tendencies had "much fuller play when they act on a people whose education has (through no fault of their own) been retarded or stunted".⁴⁶ Not exactly the language of diplomacy from one who expected the support of the Catholic clergy and people for his co-operative endeavours. Plunkett, commenting on the role of the clergy and their "immense power", referred to the "excessive and extravagant church-building in the heart and at the expense of poor communities" and called it a recent example of misdirected zeal. The cudgels were taken up by the Jesuit priest, Michael O'Riordan, first of all in a series of articles in the *The Irish Rosary*. These formed the basis of a lengthy and fairly turgid book entitled **Catholicity and Progress** in which O'Riordan replied to Plunkett's criticisms in the most unnecessary and excruciating detail. The book, if it did nothing else, demonstrated the sensitivity of the church and the clergy to criticism and their determination to respond fully and promptly.

The overall impression that remains is that of a priestly caste, confident of power and status and aloof from the daily preoccupations of parishioners. This image of the strong, self-assured, secure clergyman is reinforced in cameos such as that

⁴⁵ Bane, op. cit., pp. 24-30.

⁴⁶ Horace Plunkett, **Ireland in the New Century**, (London 1904), p.101.

presented by L. Paul Dubois in his book, **Contemporary Ireland**. "The parish priest as one meets him in the small towns of the West, with his high hat and sombre garb, his great strong frame and ruddy face, leaves a striking image in the mind. As he walks by, with his grave and keen-faced young curate, every hat is lifted, but he answers only with an amiable word addressed to each, for if he returned salutes his hat would very soon be worn out. He seems to be a king in his kingdom, affable, courteous, tolerant with non-Catholics, familiar with his flock, above all "popular". He is in truth the father of his people and no doubt an authoritative enough father. He is the arbiter of their quarrels, the confidant of their secrets. To him they turn for advice, whether in affairs of the heart or of the pocket. In return the people are ready to do him any service and to render him any homage".⁴⁷

These observations are echoed in a book called **Ireland's Disease**, a compilation of essays by Paschal Grousset, a French journalist who travelled through the country in the 1880's. About the Irish secular priests of the time and their relationships with the people, Grousset has this to say: "They are generally addressed by their christian name, prefaced by the name of *Father: Father James, Father Henry* etc., and this title well describes the terms of filial familiarity of the flocks with their pastor, - a familiarity not unfrequently manifested by sound boxes on the ear for children, and good blows with the stick on the shoulders of his grown-up parishioners, but which does not preclude respect. In the streets one always sees the parish priest respectfully greeted by the passers by; many women kneel down to kiss his hand as in Italy or Spain.

His authority is that of a patriarch, who not only wields spiritual power; but also, to a great extent, social and political power. He incarnates at once in himself the native faith so long proscribed in the country, resistance to the oppressor, heavenly hopes and compensation for human trials. As a consequence, his influence is great, for good as for ill".⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Dubois, *op. cit.*, p. 494.

⁴⁸ Grousset, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-7.

Chapter Eleven

Sickness and Old Age

One of the difficulties facing priests who were obliged to adopt celibate lifestyles was the absence of the normal supports of family. This could be accentuated at times of personal crisis as, for instance, when the priest suffered an illness which forced him to abandon the active ministry, either temporarily or permanently. The priest could then find the situation exacerbated by the lack of a caring support system, which could mean that his health was unduly neglected. This was especially true where the priest lived alone or was stationed in the more isolated areas of a diocese because most parochial residences had one or more housekeepers who discharged their duties in a conscientious and caring manner, often remaining with their clerical employers over a long number of years.

Another difficulty arising here was that priestly income was very much dependent on the priest being involved in the active ministry and therefore, a priest who contracted a serious illness was in danger of finding himself without funds and dependent on the charity of fellow priests or family. It was with a view to redressing this situation that a special fund was established in each diocese. Indeed, early in the nineteenth century, the problems were already being addressed by the establishment of special funds aimed at providing adequate finance for priests whose health was threatened. At a conference in Tipperary in August 1831, the assembled clergy of Cashel and Emly diocese decided to "establish a fund by the annual subscriptions of the priests of these united Dioceses from which adequate means of support can be drawn by any such clergyman of these Dioceses as may by visitation of Divine Providence be rendered incompetent to discharge the duties of the Mission". This conference set up the grandly titled Ecclesiastical Benevolent Society of the United Dioceses of Cashel and Emly but to the clergy generally it was known simply as the sick priests' fund or the clerical fund.¹ In effect, the Cashel clergy had established a social security system to assist fellow priests whose livelihood was threatened by illness or infirmity.

This fund was to be used strictly for the relief of sick and infirm priests of these dioceses and any priests who were under public censure were excluded from benefit, whether they were contributors or not. The case of priests with alcohol problems

¹ Printed leaflet, Rules and Regulations of the Ecclesiastical Benevolent Society of the United Dioceses of Cashel and Emly, CDA.

created a peculiar difficulty and there were differences of opinion as to whether they could be included legitimately in the category of sick priests and thus claim relief from the fund. This particular difficulty was highlighted in the case of priests whose alcohol problems were ongoing and some of their fellow priests resented such priests continuing to benefit from the sick priests' fund. This question was raised in the diocese of Ardagh in 1881 in the case of Philip Maguire, whose difficulties with alcohol extended over a number of years. Neil O'Flanagan, parish priest of Granard, reporting to Bishop Woodlock on the case, argued that if Maguire could not be given a parish, then he would have to be supported from the sick priests' fund, whether in Belgium or at home. O'Flanagan added that there would be "no chance of getting contributions from the priests".² This view was supported by another Ardagh priest, Denis Grey, who told Woodlock that Maguire had hitherto been dependent on the sick priests' fund and that "he may foolishly imagine that he can call on it again". Grey could not say whether the constitution of the fund would allow relief for Maguire if he were to go to Belgium on retreat but he was confident that "the priests of the diocese as a body would not give him a farthing from the fund". He went on to declare that many of the priests would no longer subscribe if any revenue were to be used in this way. Grey's proposed solution in this case was that the money be drawn from the old fund which was in existence when Woodlock came to the diocese as bishop.³

The fund established in the diocese of Cashel and Emly had officers appointed and also a management committee consisting of six clergymen in each conference district whose duty it was to investigate the circumstances of each individual applicant. The annual subscription to the fund was set at £1 for each parish priest and 10s. for each curate. Whenever the overall amount of the fund totalled £300, the annual subscription of each priest would be reduced by a half.⁴ These contributions could be supplemented by fines which were imposed on priests for absences from deanery conferences. There were five conferences held annually and priests were obliged under pain of censure to attend three of them. A sum of 6s. was paid towards the cost of the dinner and this sum also had to be paid by absentees. In Cashel diocese, the maximum contribution which could be made to an individual priest who was ill was set at £40 per annum with £20 as the minimum amount.⁵

The O'Carroll brothers in their diaries have some observations to offer on the operation of the fund in Cashel. Thomas O'Carroll, in one of his entries for the Famine

² N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 29 Dec 1881, ArdDA.

³ D. Grey to Woodlock, Drumshambo, 26 Dec [1881], ArdDA.

⁴ Printed leaflet, *op. cit.*, CDA.

⁵ Diary of James O'Carroll, 2 June 1862, CDA.

year 1846, records that a motion was proposed by a Mr. Morris, a parish priest, that the sick priests' fund be suspended for some time because of the numerous appeals for charity being made to the clergy at this time. The fund for the Cashel diocese alone then stood at £600 and Morris felt that this sum was "quite sufficient to meet the probable exigencies of our order". The motion was opposed and an amendment tabled by William Kirwan, P.P. Boherlahan, that the fund "be continued as usual" was carried.⁶

According to James O'Carroll, the Cashel fund had increased to £1100 by 1847 but, because of the many demands made on it, there was only £9 remaining by 1862. The Emly fund was in a much healthier state and when a Cahel priest, John Hayden, applied for support from the fund, Archbishop Leahy decided that he would be given £40 a year from the Emly fund. Leahy also decreed that each Cashel priest would have to double his contribution to the fund in order to build it up again. Two years later, however, despite the increased subscriptions of £2 for parish priests and £1 for curates, the fund was still undersubscribed. The archbishop complained that the priests of the Tipperary conference had given only £1. 10s. the previous year and he pledged that he would insist on their paying more in the coming year.⁷

Neither was James O'Carroll terribly impressed with the functioning of the committee responsible for the management of the sick priests' fund. At one point, he refers to it as "the nominal committee" and he explains: "I say nominal as Dr. Leahy disposes of the fund without consulting any of them".⁸ The diarist also describes an attempt to have a representative of the curates elected to the management committee. At O'Carroll's suggestion, Patrick Morris, a curate at Borris-Illeigh was selected as the curates' candidate. Another curate, Theophilus O'Meara, actively canvassed for William Wall, a nephew of the previous archbishop, Michael Slattery. According to O'Carroll, O'Meara "even stood by till he saw ... Mr. Wall's name written on a scrap of paper which was then thrown into a hat used as an urn on such occasions". O'Carroll then states non-committally that Wall was returned by a majority of one.⁹

It was the accepted position that a priest who was forced off the ministry through ill health should be supported from the fund of the diocese in which he was ministering at the time of his illness. In 1863, a Fr. McNamara, who had been granted an *exeat* from Killaloe to Dublin diocese, was claiming sickness benefit from the

⁶ Diary of Thomas O'Carroll, 14 April 1846, CDA.

⁷ Diary of James O'Carroll, April 1864, CDA.

⁸ *Ibid.* April 1864, CDA.

⁹ *Ibid.* 2 June 1862, CDA.

Killaloe fund. McNamara was unhappy with the grant of £30 a year and apparently, had made reference to another case in Killaloe where the priest was in receipt of a pension of £50 a year. John Kenny, a priest of Killaloe diocese, explained to the archbishop of Dublin, Paul Cullen, that this latter grant could be accepted as the norm as this particular priest had retired "after thirty seven years hard labour... " and he had since died. At that time in Killaloe, there were three priests in receipt of aid from the sick priests' fund and the allowance did not exceed £40 yearly. In Kenny's opinion, McNamara ought to have been satisfied with the grant of £30.¹⁰

Another priest who was most unhappy with the allowances made to sick priests was Matthew Doyle of Aughrim, Co. Wicklow in Dublin diocese. Doyle wrote to Cardinal Edward McCabe in July 1884 to express his dissatisfaction. "It seems to me very hard", Doyle declared, "that our Cler. Fund Society with a fund of over £4,000, together with its interest in yearly dividend and perhaps accidental donations and certain annual subscriptions from us to the amount of over £300, could not give to infirm priests more than £6 per month or 27s. 6d. a week". Doyle stated that he believed that the majority of committee members who awarded "this miserable pittance" were priests who had "parishes to support them". "The sum awarded would not supply me with beef-tea", the aggrieved priest continued, "not to speak of the many other things absolutely needed if one is wanted to recover". The allowance of 27s. 6d. a week might be sufficient for an aged priest who was waiting for death, Doyle argued, but to offer such a sum to a young priest and tell him he could recover health and strength seemed "something bordering closely on mockery....".¹¹

This appeal from Doyle does not appear to have been successful in achieving an increase in grant aid, as in November 1890, the committee of the Dublin Clerical Fund Society voted an allowance of £6 a month to Edward O'Reilly until he recovered his health. At the meeting where this decision was taken, it was also decided to invest the funds of the society, at that time in government securities, in the new issue of Dublin Corporation stock.¹²

It does seem, in some cases certainly, that the amounts granted to priests fell short of the amount necessary to make ends meet. For instance, in August 1893, Bishop Gillooly of Elphin had a letter from a layman, Willam Madden, regarding the financial situation of his deceased brother, James Madden, a priest of Elphin diocese.

¹⁰ John Kenny to Cullen, Ennis, 30 Aug 1863, DDA.

¹¹ Matthew Doyle to McCabe, Tinakilly, Aughrim, Co. Wicklow, 16 July [1884], DDA.

¹² Edward Quinn to Walsh, St. Audeon's, High St., Dublin, 28 Nov 1890, DDA.

William Madden was executor for his brother's will and in realising the assets, he found that liabilities exceeded assets by £197 10s. Madden, who was a married man with five children, stated that he was not in a position to pay off this debt and he requested Gillooly to make this sum of money available from the sick priests' fund. Madden enclosed a full statement of assets and liabilities and a cheque for the money which his brother had in hand.¹³

Gillooly made enquiries about the situation of the late priest and he was informed by Patrick Mannion of Elphin parish that James Madden had come to that parish on 20 April 1893 and had died on 19 June. During that time, Mannion said, Madden had received his share of the parochial revenue. Also, Mannion pointed out that Madden's assets were so inconsiderable that no claim was made on him for the keep of his house, his servants or other hospitalities.¹⁴

The bishop then responded to William Madden, saying that he was not free to use the sick priests' fund "except for authorised expenses incurred in or by their sickness and which their revenue is insufficient to meet". He enclosed a cheque for £20.¹⁵ In his reply, William Madden reminded the bishop that his brother had suffered an attack of rheumatic fever in 1889 while he was serving at Castletown but his application for assistance from the sick priests' fund was refused so that "he was unable to take a vacation to recoup his health". Madden appealed to the bishop once more but it is doubtful if this appeal was any more successful.¹⁶

The establishment of a fund to render financial assistance to priests who were ill or infirm was a response to a need which had become obvious. Whether the Cashel priests in 1831 had set a headline for the rest of the country we do not know but the existence of such a fund had clearly become an accepted part of diocesan organisation in all parts of the country in the second half of the century.

Retirement and Clerical Pensions

Given this response and the concern to provide for priests with health problems, it is surprising that a similar scheme was not devised to provide adequate pensions for priests who were obliged to retire from the ministry because of advancing

¹³ William A. Madden to Gillooly, 4 Spencer Terrace, Kilmainham, Dublin, 26 Aug 1893, EDA.

¹⁴ P. Mannion to Gillooly, The Presbytery, Elphin, 14 Sept 1893, EDA.

¹⁵ Note in Gillooly's hand, EDA.

¹⁶ William A. Madden to Gillooly, 4 Spencer Terrace, Kilmainham, Dublin, 17 Sept 1893, EDA.

years. The matter of retirement was fairly haphazard and varied from one individual priest to another. For a start, there was no specific age at which it was recommended that a priest should retire from active duty. More importantly, there was no definite arrangement which guaranteed a retiring priest an adequate pension and consequently, there was no incentive for an aging and infirm priest to retire.

The fears surrounding the prospect of retirement were expressed in the courteous letter of resignation from John Boyd, parish priest of Kilbride and Kilgefin in the diocese of Elphin. Boyd, writing in June 1863, made his resignation effective from July 1st so that he could claim a share in the current Easter dues when the collection had been completed. "I am not stoical enough to conceal that I feel a pang on my severance from my dear flock who were to me a crown and a consolation", the gentle parish priest wrote. He had two requests to make - firstly, that he should be buried under the confessional in the chapel of Kilbride and secondly, he pleaded: "...should it be my fate to drag on a painful existence for some time longer in this wretched world, don't let me fall on the charity of anyone or expose my last days to the sorrows of destitution".¹⁷

The bishop to whom this letter was addressed was Laurence Gillooly, who, aware of the problems of maladministration which could be caused by aged and infirm parish priests, seems to have actively encouraged older priests to resign their parishes. Some went willingly but not all accepted with the same grace as John Boyd. Henry Brennan, the turbulent parish priest of Tissera, was finally forced to resign in September 1864, following a long war of attrition with bishops and curates.¹⁸ William Mulrenan, P.P. Kilbegnet, was obliged to resign, having been found guilty of certain offences, which are not specified in his letter of resignation.¹⁹ As regards a Fr. White, who was obviously delaying his decision, Gillooly told him bluntly: "After duly considering the state of your health past and present, I think it is clearly my duty to you and to your parishioners to relieve you entirely of the administration of your parish.. ". White was told that he would be left in the parish house and that he would be paid a portion of the parochial revenue.²⁰

Since there was no statute obliging priests to retire at a specific age, it was difficult sometimes for bishops to persuade aged and infirm priests that they ought to resign. A priest of Dublin diocese, P. J. Murtagh, took exception to the suggestion that

¹⁷ John Boyd P.P. to Gillooly, Doorty, 16 June 1868, EDA.

¹⁸ Resignation of Henry Brennan, 16 Sept 1864, EDA; cf. Chap 2, Parish Priests and Curates.

¹⁹ Resignation of William Mulrenan, P.P. Kilbegnet, undated, EDA.

²⁰ L. G[jillooly] to White, undated, (copy), EDA.

he should retire because of his age or, as he himself put it, "upon the grave charge of being advanced in years". Murtagh resented the charges of maladministration which were made against him and he described the manner in which he was being treated as "unwarranted". He ended his letter of protest: "But there is a limit to endurance and I therefore most respectfully call on Your Eminence to see justice done me even at the eleventh hour".²¹ Murtagh, however, does not seem to have been in a position to argue, as his debts were mounting and when he refused to submit to Paul Cullen's demands, he was visited by the sherriff's bailiff, who seized his possessions and put them up for auction. Again, Murtagh wrote to Cullen to protest at what he termed mildly "a result so unfavourable, so unexpected".²²

The crucial considerations for any priest contemplating retirement were the terms of his retirement, in particular the amount of the pension being offered him. Again, since there were no definite norms laid down, the amount of the pension was usually a matter for negotiation between the retiring priest and his superiors. John MacHale of Tuam, in a letter to Tobias Kirby in Rome in May 1851, expressed his anxiety about the situation of Thomas McManus, who had resigned his parish and gone to live with this brother, Patrick, parish priest of Crossboyne. Thomas McManus, who was described by MacHale as "a pious and exemplary priest", was allocated a pension of £30 a year from his parish. This seems a generous allocation but, as a consequence of the Famine, the parish could not give him "even £15 occasionally". MacHale's solution then was to make a provision whereby Thomas McManus would receive £10 from the parish of Crossboyne, now vacant on his brother's resignation, and £20 from his own parish.²³

It may be that this sum of £30 per annum represents the standard payment of the time. Three years later, John Murphy received a pension of £35 a year and this from Cashel diocese, where priests would have enjoyed a more substantial income than in Tuam.²⁴ And twenty-five years later, in 1879, it was recommended that James Duffy of Drumlish in Ardagh diocese, who was forced to resign because of his problems with alcohol, should receive a pension of £60 a year.²⁵

A number of priests in Cashel diocese resigned in the 1880's and the amount of their pensions varied. In the case of Paul Heney, P.P. Kiltely and Dromkeen, who

21 P.J. Murtagh to Cullen, Kilcullen, Newbridge, Sunday night, DDA.

22 P.J. Murtagh to Cullen, Kilcullen, Newbridge, Friday 29th, DDA.

23 John MacHale to Kirby, Tuam, 5 May 1851, quoted in O Tuairisg, *op.cit.*, I. 352.

24 T. O'Connor to Slattery, Templemore, 16 Oct 1854, CDA.

25 N. O'Flanagan to Woodlock, Granard, 3 Dec 1879, ArdDA.

resigned in November 1886 because of old age and infirmity, definite terms were agreed. The parochial house and land were transferred legally to his successor, who undertook to pay all Heney's lawful debts. The retiring P.P. was to live with his successor and was to receive what was described as "his parochial chances as usual", plus £15 "for pocket money".²⁶ In other cases, Richard Rafter, who resigned in 1886, expected a pension of £80 a year²⁷ while John Wood, who resigned the following year, placed himself entirely in the hands of Dr. Croke as to the amount of the pension he was to receive. This may have been a mistake, as Wood was allocated a sum of £45 a year,²⁸ well short of the amount granted to John Markey, who resigned the parish of Ballylanders in 1889 and received £100 for the first year of his retirement and £80 a year thereafter.²⁹ William Cooney, a man described by Croke as "rough, big and uncivilized, though strange to say conscientious, sober and correct", retired from the parish of Cahirconlish in the same year with a pension of £100 a year.³⁰

Another reluctant resignee was Kieran Denvir, bishop of Down and Connor but when eventually he did agree to resign the see in 1865, he was granted an annual pension of £400 to be paid 'out of the revenue of the diocese'.³¹ Given that £100 a year was considered to be an adequate pension for a parish priest in a relatively affluent diocese like Cashel in 1889, the amount of Denvir's pension is a clear indication of the superior status of bishops compared with that of even the senior clerics.

It is difficult to know what criteria were employed in the calculation of clerical pensions. In 1881 in Dublin, a diocese where clerical income in many parishes would have been the highest in the country, William Hamilton, parish priest of Blessington and one of the most prominent clerics in the diocese, was obliged to retire on a pension of £50 a year. This appears to compare unfavourably with the situation in Cashel but perhaps a factor in the equation was that Hamilton was allowed to retain possession of the parochial house and ground attached during his lifetime. Hamilton did not go willingly but the archbishop, Edward McCabe, whose letters to his priests were usually blunt and direct, simply sent the reluctant Hamilton a form with the instruction to sign it immediately. "When it is duly executed", said McCabe, who obviously did not expect

²⁶ Resignation of Paul Heney, P.P. Killeely and Dromkeen, 16 Nov 1886, CDA.

²⁷ Resignation of Richard Rafter, 15 Dec 1886, CDA.

²⁸ Resignation of John Wood, P.P. Upperchurch and Drumbane, 18 April 1887, CDA.

²⁹ Resignation of John Markey, P.P. Ballylanders, 6 Nov 1889, CDA.

³⁰ Resignation of William Cooney, P.P. Cahirconlish, 1 Sept 1889, CDA.

³¹ Macaulay, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

any further argument, "you will be entirely released from a charge which must press heavily on you".³²

The fact that there was no agreed sum to be paid could lead to long and protracted negotiations as retired priests sought to improve their position. Sometimes these disputes could continue over a number of years, as in the case of Daniel McGettigan, a priest of Raphoe diocese. McGettigan, who had alcohol problems, was already contemplating retirement when Bishop James McDevitt succeeded to Raphoe in 1871. Writing from Mount Melleray abbey to McDevitt in May 1871, McGettigan spoke of his plans to enter some religious house on the continent or to go and live in some town where he was not known. But first of all, he required an authoritative document to show that he was in receipt of a pension and that he was free of censure. By the time he wrote this letter, McGettigan had spent nine months in Mount Melleray which was a longer time than was usually allowed. "I have no one but the Abbot from whom to ask for advice or direction", he said, "I don't know if he concerns himself in such things and I fear that he thinks (as I know I have) that I have trespassed a good deal, too much, on his goodness and forbearance". It would appear that there were difficulties between McGettigan and the former bishop, as the letter goes on: "I have been long waiting for your appointment that I might decide on my course. I feel that you find me imposed on you a great part of the *solicitududo ecclesiae*, I wish it were otherwise. I would much prefer to welcome you to the diocese but since I cannot have that privilege except the expression of my thanks my hearty wishes for your succesful and blessed career...."³³

Although the amount to be paid McGettigan had been set by Propaganda at £50 per annum³⁴, this was considered inadequate by a priest who had plans to live abroad. Bartholomew Fitzpatrick, the Abbot of Mount Melleray, wrote to McDevitt in July to inform him that McGettigan had departed for an abbey in France. McGettigan had left Melleray without waiting for the permission of his bishop but, Fitzpatrick commented, "he acted bona fide, believing that he had a right to change his residence".³⁵

Arrived in France, McGettigan's next letter came from an abbey in the Loire Imperieure district. He had now decided that he had a vocation to become a Trappist monk and so he had travelled in the company of the Abbot of the French abbey, who

³² Edward McCabe to Hamilton, 3 Oct 1881, (copy), DDA. This is one of a series of letters exchanged between McCabe and Hamilton.

³³ D. McGettigan to McDevitt, Mount Melleray Abbey, Cappoquin, 13 May 1871, RDA.

³⁴ Daniel McGettigan to McDevitt, Armagh, 9 May 1871, RDA.

³⁵ Bartholomew Fitzpartick to McDevitt, Mount Melleray Abbey, Cappoquinn, Co. Waterford, 19 July 1871, RDA.

had been on a visit to Ireland. The cost of McGettigan's stay in this abbey was 100 francs or £32 and when this was paid, McGettigan stated that he would have only a small surplus to clothe himself and "to defray any small incidental expenses". "Fully convinced that you approve of the course I have adopted", the priest declared somewhat disingenuously, "I did not think it necessary to write to you". He regretted having to leave his native country but he was hopeful of spending the rest of his days "in tranquillity and peace".³⁶

The peace and tranquillity were not to be found in this particular Trappist monastery and Daniel McGettigan was on the move again, as he became something of a *vagus* or wandering clergyman. In 1877, he was to be found in Brussels³⁷ and the following year he had taken up residence in Gand.³⁸ He acknowledged receipt of a payment of £25 and, while still protesting the inadequacy of the figure, he seems more reconciled to the fact that any increase was unlikely.

The bishop, James McDevitt, was satisfied that £50 per annum was the appropriate amount for priests retiring in Raphoe diocese. This was the amount allocated to John Madden, the parish priest of Killymard, who was forced to resign his parish and go to the U.S.³⁹ Madden, too, continued to protest about the inadequacy of the sum and to seek an increase. £50 was also the sum allocated to John Boyle, who, like McGettigan, was forced to resign because of alcohol problems and who, like McGettigan and Madden, claimed that it was inadequate and could not provide him with a decent living.⁴⁰

Finally, there was the case of Eugene Mulholland D.D., a priest of Armagh diocese. In a letter written in 1859 to Paul Cullen, who had transferred as archbishop in 1852 from Armagh to Dublin, Mulholland stated his case. Briefly, he complained that, at the time of his resignation, a pension of £50 a year was the sum agreed. However in September 1847, Archbishop Crolly of Armagh claimed that Mulholland had been deprived of this sum because of "some deficiency" in his conduct. This charge was vigorously denied by Mulholland, who stated that he had not received "a sou of this provision" since Crolly's death in 1849. Since his resignation, Mulholland was a much travelled man and he informed Cullen that he could produce testimonials from Madrid, Seville and Propaganda in Rome. He also claimed to be "extremely

³⁶ Daniel McGettigan to McDevitt, Abbaye, Loire Imperieure, France, 25 July 1871, RDA.

³⁷ Daniel McGettigan to McDevitt, Brussels, 14 April 1877, RDA.

³⁸ Daniel McGettigan to McDevitt, Gand, 23 Nov 1878, RDA.

³⁹ Chris McGlynn to McDevitt, Killymard, Donegal, 23 Nov 1875, RDA.

⁴⁰ John Boyle to McDevitt, 4 May 1871, RDA.

weak, scarce able to walk" and suffering from a heart infection.⁴¹ The following month, there was another letter, this time to Dr. Dixon of Armagh, in which Mulholland enclosed more documents to substantiate his claim to a pension of £50 a year. He described the state of his health as "very precarious".⁴²

Mulholland was also pursuing the case at Rome, as is clear from a letter to Dixon in March 1861. Writing this time from the Isle of Man, Mulholland claimed to have the support of Cardinal Barnabo of Propaganda. He deplored the grant of £10 on which he was expected to exist, saying that the sum was scarcely sufficient to pay a servant, "much less to provide lodging and maintenance... ". He now begged Dixon to intercede for him with Paul Cullen so that he might be placed in some ecclesiastical institution, where he could "be sure of the consoling sympathy which the Catholic religion knows so well and where expense would be moderate".⁴³

On his return to Dublin, Eugene Mulholland called on the vicar general, Dr. Yore, to see if he would use his influence in procuring a chaplaincy "to supplement in some manner the inadequacy of the subsidy offered.... ". Yore told Mulholland that he should apply to his own diocese of Armagh. Aware that he was not welcome in Armagh, Mulholland stated that he had no alternative but to apply to the Poor Law Commissioners for help. He also threatened to make public the rescript and documents of Propaganda together with the correspondence from Cullen, Dixon and Michael Kieran, dean of Dundalk, who had previously handled the case. This certainly sounded like a threat, although Mulholland himself denied that such was his intention, describing it as "a step to which circumstances reluctantly oblige me to adopt".⁴⁴

To judge from his next and last letter, it would appear that Mulholland had succeeded in convincing Barnabo, head of Propaganda in Rome, of the validity of his case. Propaganda was the department of the Vatican which dealt, among others, with the problems of the Irish Catholic church. Mulholland now wrote to say that a letter was on its way from Rome to Dixon and Cullen in which Barnabo would refer to "the total insufficiency of the provision" offered to Mulholland for his maintenance. This provision, said Mulholland, was disproportionate to the terms offered in the original rescript and was also in conflict with the sworn evidence of Cullen who told a committee of the House of Commons that £60 to £80 was needed to support a priest who was in good health _ "... how much the more so for one like myself", Mulholland

41 E. Mulholland D.D. to Dr. Yore, V.G., 25 Nov 1859, ArmDA.

42 Eugene Mulholland D.D. to Dixon, 3 Usher's Island, Dublin, 13 Dec 1859, ArmDA.

43 E. Mulholland to Dixon, 10 Fort St., Douglas, Isle of Man, 4 March 1861, ArmDA.

44 E. Mulholland D.D. to Dixon, 11 Blackhall St., Dublin 6 July 1861, ArmDA.

asserted, "suffering as you know from long severe illness". He was hopeful that the letter from Barnabo would bring a satisfactory response and he pointed out that his servant had not received any wages for the previous ten years. "My position is such that I can no longer remain as I am", the unfortunate priest concluded.⁴⁵

One must assume that, if the letter from Barnabo was as supportive of his case as Mulholland stated, then the bishops would act to improve his situation. This particular case serves to underline the unsatisfactory nature of the provision of pensions for those about to retire. The situation varied from one individual case to another and it is very difficult to know what the ground rules were in estimating the amount of pensions. There were considerable variations, not only from one diocese to the next but even within the same diocese. In some cases, retiring priests were allowed to remain on in the parochial residence - which must have caused problems for the incoming parish priest. Questions arise, too, as to whether priests from the more affluent parishes received better treatment than those from less well off parishes - this must have been true in those cases where retiring priests were allocated a proportion of parish revenue as pension funds. Finally, one wonders if the amount of the pension was in any way linked to the bishop's perception of the worth of the particular priest. Given all of these uncertainties, one can understand perfectly the reluctance of priests to retire, as aging priests must have been anticipating retirement with some degree of apprehension and concern for their future welfare.

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