

PEPLOGRAPHIA DVBLINENSIS

Memorial Discourses

PREACHED IN THE CHAPEL OF TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN

1895—1902

Πέπλον ἐποίησαν τῇ Ἀθηνᾷ καὶ ἐγράψαν
τοὺς ἀρίστους ἐν αὐτῷ.

—SUIDAS

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PREFACE

FOR some years past a Festival Service has been held in the Chapel of Trinity College, Dublin, on the evening of Trinity Monday, and a Sermon has been preached in memory of some eminent member of the College. No attempt has been made to select only the very greatest names, and Trinity men may wonder at some of the omissions. But it is well that we should be reminded from time to time of the services to the College rendered by benefactors like Stearne, of the piety of Wilson, the patriotism of Grattan and King, the bright example of Falkland, as well as of the wider fame of Berkeley and Ussher and Burke. On future occasions it is hoped that some of the omissions may be made good, and that Swift and Goldsmith may receive due recognition.

Meantime, in borrowing from Varro for this series his title of *Peplographia*, we believe that we have included in it no portrait which he would have deemed unworthy of being represented on the Robe of Athena, or to which he would have refused a place in his own 'Book of Worthies.'

J. H. BERNARD.

THE DEANERY,
ST. PATRICK'S CLOSE, DUBLIN,
St. Bartholomew's Day, 1902.

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PREACHED ON TRINITY MONDAY, 1897, BY REV. JOHN HENRY
BERNARD, D.D., FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, AND ARCHBISHOP
KING'S LECTURER IN DIVINITY.

III

BISHOP BERKELEY

*This is Eternal Life, that they may know Thee the
only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast
sent.*

ST. JOHN, xvii. 3.

THIS was the text selected by George Berkeley, then at the height of his fame, when preaching at the Church of St. Mary-le-bow the annual sermon for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in the year 1732. He had lately returned from New England, having failed in the chivalrous enterprise which had drawn him across the Atlantic ; and he seized the great opportunity to speak with unfaltering conviction of the knowledge of God which is itself Eternal Life as 'the greatest good that can befall us, the very end of our being, and that alone which can crown and satisfy our wishes, and without which we shall be ever restless and

uneasy.* We are not now concerned with the matter of the discourse; but his text was not only the text of his sermon, it was the text of his life. To know God; that is the first necessity of reason, for man is made in the image of God. But how is such knowledge possible? What, indeed, is knowledge at all? It is the earliest question of the inquirer who desires to understand the mystery of his own life and thought. What is knowledge? Who am I that desires to know? And what is the significance of these external objects which seem to present themselves in the course of my experience, as distinct from my thinking self?

These are the questions which exercised the mind of the strange boy, George Berkeley, when an undergraduate of this College in the opening years of the eighteenth century. The atmosphere of the place was, perhaps, not wholly unfavourable to his mental growth. The College was rapidly recovering from the troubles of the Revolution; and its vigour was not only indicated by the outward signs of prosperity which its new buildings and courts displayed, but by the spirit of reaction against received ways of speculation then beginning to be apparent. Newton's *Principia* had fascinated not only professed mathematicians, but all thoughtful men, by

* *Works* (Fraser's edition), iii. 236.

the wide view of the universe and its laws which it opened out. And the subtleties of the schoolmen, already discredited among Englishmen by the teaching of Bacon, were being replaced in University studies by Locke's sober treatise on the *Human Understanding*. In Dublin, both the Provost and the Archbishop were men of mark among the philosophical writers of the day; and the names of Peter Browne and of William King are not yet forgotten among us.

This was the atmosphere in which Berkeley found himself when he left Kilkenny School in the year 1700 and in which he passed the next thirteen years of his life. Elected a scholar of the house while yet a boy, in due course he gained his Fellowship, 'the only reward of learning which the kingdom of Ireland hath to bestow,' as one of his biographers caustically observes.* His ordination in the College Chapel followed, with advancement as time went on, to the usual minor offices of the College. But all through these thirteen years, whether as boy or man, teacher or taught, the problems on which his best thoughts were bestowed, were concerned with those ultimate mysteries of knowledge and existence of which I have spoken. The pages of his *Commonplace Book* still preserve his first efforts to formulate his

* See Fraser's *Life*, p. 23.

opinions on these high topics ; and it is interesting to read that he founded a College Society for the discussion of the 'New Philosophy,' which reminds us in many of its regulations of the debating societies of our own day. This is not the occasion on which to expound the Berkeleian system, and yet a word or two must be said, if we are to understand in any degree the originality of his genius, or the extraordinary reputation which this young Irishman had achieved by the time he was five-and-twenty.

I. Previous speculation had accepted the popular distinction between mind and matter as sufficiently exact to serve as a basis for theory ; and the word 'matter' was freely used in all the philosophical treatises of the time. But Berkeley declared that when people speak of 'matter,' they speak of what no man can understand, for the word has no meaning at all. Sights and sounds, tastes and smells, these are the true realities with which we are concerned ; but to affirm the existence of something beyond and behind the qualities which can be perceived by the senses, is to use words without any ideas corresponding to them, and this is the universal blunder of speculative writers, who 'first raise a dust and then complain that they cannot see.' The thesis that matter, apart from its qualities, is only a fiction

of the metaphysicians, is pressed home by Berkeley with a relentless logic which is still unanswered, and with that wealth of illustration and beauty of style which render his writings the most attractive in the whole range of English philosophical literature. It is not surprising that such a doctrine as this, however cautiously and skilfully expounded, met with ridicule at the first. It was all but inevitable that the teaching of Berkeley, like the teaching of Socrates, should be decried as leading to universal scepticism, and that its author should be counted by men of the world as affording one more illustration of the bewildering effects of metaphysic on the most promising genius. The inscription below the window placed in our Chapel in Berkeley's honour sufficiently indicates the temper with which his speculations were received by many even in a later age. 'When the people heard him, they were astonished at his doctrine.'

But what was Berkeley's own opinion of his work ? It was this, that far from confounding the sources of knowledge, he alone had purified the stream. He claimed to have shown where knowledge might be sought, to have demonstrated that spirit, not matter, is the last reality which we reach, the only active force in the world of which we can know anything. He declares as a 'new principle' that nothing exists

independent of perception or will. Not indeed that corn does not grow or rivers run when we are not gazing upon them, but that the only meaning we can offer to ourselves of *existence* is that what we call the existing thing is *perceived*; if not by men, yet by God, the Universal Spirit, who speaks to mankind by the sensations which they daily and hourly receive. And thus we come upon the Being of God, not as a matter for fine-drawn argument, but as the very condition of the coherence and sanity of our experience. Do you call this novel doctrine, says Berkeley? Truly yes, I have called no man master. My thoughts are my own. *Neminem transcripsi*, he proudly writes. But sceptical? Nay: 'The same principles, which at first view lead to Scepticism, pursued to a certain point, bring men back to common sense.'*

How very imperfect and crude such a sketch as this is, those will know who have studied the history of western philosophy. I only desire to emphasise two or three points. First, the courage and independence of this teaching. And secondly the fact that, be it true or false, it has coloured all later metaphysics. More deeply than any other Irishman, Berkeley has affected the main current of speculative opinion. He stands between Locke and Hume as

* *Works*, i. 360.

one of the immediate precursors of modern Idealism. And mark that this philosophy—however bold and venturesome it be—is still a Christian philosophy. It is no slight thing to be able to say that the greatest thinker of his age, the greatest figure in the history of European speculation whom our University has trained, was one, who, like Origen, and Augustine, and Malebranche, and Pascal, found perfect intellectual freedom in 'bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.'*

II. A Christian philosopher: Berkeley was more than a philosopher; it was not on account of his philosophy that Kant calls him 'the good Berkeley.' And we have now to think of him, not as a philosopher, but as a philanthropist; not as a student in his cloister, but as a citizen of the world. For Berkeley did not spend his life at Trinity College. Through the good offices of Swift he was introduced to all that was best in London society, where the charm of his personality served to spread more widely the fame which his extraordinary intellectual powers had already gained for him. The man who was the associate of Swift and Butler, to whom Pope assigned 'every virtue under heaven,' was at no loss for friends. 'So much understanding,' says Atterbury in his oft-quoted panegyric, 'so much knowledge, so much innocence, and such humility, I did not think had

* 2 Cor. x. 5.

been the portion of any but angels till I saw this gentleman.* Term after term of absence was granted to him by the authorities of his College, more lenient in the matter of discipline than would be possible in these busier days of ours; and eight years of travel and of congenial society had passed away when he returned to Dublin. He was now a great man, as the world counts greatness; and high ecclesiastical preferment was only a question of time. Money came to him in a curious and romantic fashion; for poor Esther Vanhomrigh, when her heart was broken by Swift, bequeathed to Berkeley some of her private fortune. The Deanery of Derry quickly followed, and his connexion with this College, of which he was now a Senior Fellow, ceased in 1724. But Dean Berkeley had a side to his character which had not hitherto been understood. *Non sibi sed toti* was the motto he chose for himself. And he was sick at heart when he reflected on the decay of religion and of morality among the upper classes in these islands. There were better things on which a man might spend his life than a learned leisure; and in his dreams he travelled beyond the limits of our older civilisations to a new country—

‘Where men shall not impose for truth and sense,
The pedantry of courts and schools.’ †

* *Life*, p. 59.

† *Works*, iii. 232.

America at that day was to the Englishman in some respects like what India is for us. It was the most important of our colonial possessions, and for the well-being of its native peoples England lay under a great responsibility. And Berkeley conceived the bold idea of establishing a Missionary College in Bermuda ‘for the better supplying (as he phrased it) of churches in our foreign plantations, and for converting the savage Americans to Christianity.’ Let Swift tell the story as he told it to the Lord Lieutenant of the day. ‘He is an absolute philosopher,’ said the cynical Dean, ‘with respect to money, titles, and power; and for three years past has been struck with a notion of founding a University at Bermudas by a charter from the Crown. He has seduced several of the hopefulest young clergymen and others here, many of them well provided for, and all in the fairest way for preferment; but in England his conquests are greater, and I doubt will spread very far this winter. . . . He most exorbitantly proposes a whole hundred pounds a year for himself, fifty pounds for a Fellow, and ten for a student. His heart will break if his Deanery be not taken from him, and left to your Excellency’s disposal.’* The spirit which had sent forth Columba to preach the Gospel to the islands of the North was not dead;

* *Life*, p. 102.

and the Divine voice came to Berkeley as it had come to Columba with the imperious message, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.'

We may linger for a moment over this chivalrous project, for, if I mistake not, we may trace in the plan, sketched by Berkeley, many features which the nineteenth century, with a larger experience of missionary effort, has found essential to its success. He saw that the surest token of the progress of Christianity in any new country would be the establishment of a native ministry. To this the efforts of missionaries must be directed, and in order that the foundations of this great work should be truly laid it was needful that the pioneers who went forth should be men of high attainments and of unspotted lives. 'The clergy sent over to America,' he writes, 'have proved, too many of them, very meanly qualified, both in learning and morals, for the discharge of their office. And indeed little can be expected from the example or instruction of those who quit their native country on no other motive than that they are unable to procure a livelihood in it, which is known to be often the case.' . . . But 'supplied' the Americans 'must be with such as can be picked up in England or Ireland, until a nursery of learning for the education of the natives is

founded.* We have learnt, though tardily, the wisdom of these quiet words.

For his new College Berkeley sought and obtained a Charter from the Crown; and a large sum of money was provided by private friends for the initial expenses of the enterprise. Parliament was induced to promise £20,000 towards its accomplishment. He met, indeed, with much opposition, as might have been anticipated. 'Men of narrow minds,' he tells us, 'have a peculiar talent at objection, being never at a loss for something to say against whatsoever is not of their own proposing.† But his ardent spirit overbore all objections; and it was not the least wonderful result of his contagious enthusiasm that he persuaded three of his colleagues, brother Fellows of Trinity College, to abandon their prospects at home and cast in their lot with him.‡ We are not unfamiliar in our own time with the spectacle of men giving up much that the world prizes most, in obedience to the call of their Divine Master. But in the eighteenth century it was counted little less than a miracle that a Dean should abandon his deanery, and a scholar his academic leisure with the single desire to bring the Gospel to men of another race and country.

* *Works*, iii. 216, 217.

† *Ibid.*, iii. 225.

‡ Their names are worthy of record: William Thompson, Jonathan Rogers, and James King.

The sequel of the story you know. Berkeley never reached Bermuda. He spent two years in New England with his young wife and some friends, waiting for the promised assistance from the British Parliament, which never came. And at last a cynical, though not altogether unfriendly, letter from Sir Robert Walpole informed him that his project had failed. In the absence of the head that had planned, and the eloquent tongue that had pleaded the cause of the strange enterprise, the *vis inertiae* of custom, the love of money, the corruption of political partisanship, proved too strong. And so Dr. Berkeley returned to London with impoverished fortune, but with unabated courage, and endowed with that larger and more genial wisdom which trial and discipline bring to the brave and wise.

III. Courage and wisdom: they are the two notes of his life. I have tried to speak of the first. The story of his later years will abundantly illustrate the second. The period of storm and stress was now past; and the offer soon came of an Irish Bishopric, though a poor one if measured by money standards. Berkeley was consecrated Bishop of Cloyne at Old St. Paul's Church, Dublin, in 1734; and in the quiet seclusion of his country See, he spent the next twenty years, still the same 'absolute philosopher with respect to money, titles, and power'

that Swift had found him. When the Irish Primacy is vacant, this is the spirit in which he replies to the suggestion of advancement: 'I am no man's rival or competitor in this matter. I am not in love with feasts, and crowds, and visits, and late hours, and strange faces, and a hurry of affairs often insignificant. For my own private satisfaction I had rather be master of my time than wear a diadem. I repeat these things to you, that I may not seem to have declined all steps to the Primacy out of singularity, or pride, or stupidity, but from solid motives. As for the argument from the opportunity of doing good, I observe that duty obliges men in high stations not to decline occasions of doing good; but duty doth not oblige men to solicit such high stations.*'

* *Life*, p. 313. The same spirit shows itself in an interesting letter in the possession of the Bishop of Ripon (hitherto unpublished), written, in 1745, by Berkeley to Dr. Clarke, the Vice-Provost of Trinity College, who had apparently solicited his good offices in the matter of preferment:—'I would not suppose your affairs are at all the worse for my not being in town; for, to speak the truth, I would have been of no use with my Lord Lieutenant, unless he had given me a decent opportunity of speaking to the point, by consulting or advising with me about it, a thing which I had no right to expect. I have been told His Excellency expressed a particular esteem for you publicly at the Castle, on occasion of the compliment you made him on his first arrival. This personal prepossession in your favour, grounded on his own sense of your merit, is, in my opinion, worth twenty recommendations, even of those great men in power who alone have a right to make them. To conclude, I wish you all success in your undertakings, being with sincere regard,' &c. Berkeley's rebuke to the worthy Vice-Provost is very dexterously expressed.

Duty obliges men in high stations not to decline occasions of doing good. And certainly Berkeley was not the man to neglect those works of practical usefulness which a Bishop might encourage in a poor diocese like Cloyne. His adventures into the field of therapeutics may excite a smile; but his concern for the welfare of the peasantry was exhibited otherwise than by his advocacy of the healing virtues of Tar Water. His appeal, for instance, to the Roman Catholic clergy of Ireland is one of the most remarkable episcopal utterances ever published in this country. 'Why should we not,' he asks, 'conspire in one and the same design to promote the common good of our country?*' And he was not a prophet of smooth things. 'Indolence in dirt,' says this keen observer, 'is a terrible symptom . . . [and] alas! our poor Irish are wedded to dirt on principle. It is with some of them a maxim that the way to make children thrive is to keep them dirty. And I do verily believe that the familiarity with dirt, contracted and nourished from their infancy, is one great cause of that sloth which attends them in every stage of life. Were children but brought up in an abhorrence of dirt, and obliged to keep themselves clean, they would have something to do, whereas they now do nothing.†' Here was plain

* *Works*, iii. 437.

† *Ibid.*, iii. 445.

speaking indeed; and it is much to the credit of the parties concerned and an eloquent witness to the high esteem in which the Bishop was held by all classes, that he was publicly thanked for his intervention by the men whom he had addressed. But the Bishop did not confine himself to language such as this. We at least cannot forget that he was the first Irishman of position to recommend the admission of Roman Catholics to this College.* For he recognised that the University had duties to the nation which were not discharged by providing instruction for a favoured class.

In the encouragement of tolerance, of industry, of learning, among all ranks of his countrymen the autumn of life was serenely passed. Philosophy, he taught men by precept and by example, was no idle dreaming. 'Truth itself,' he had said, 'is valued by the public, as it hath an influence and is felt in the course of life. You may confute a whole shelf of schoolmen and discover many speculative truths, without any great merit towards your country.' And in the pursuit of truth, the quest after knowledge, he is no less eager than in the days of old. He is not indeed so proudly confident. The great philosophical treatise in which he has embodied the mature thoughts of his old age is far different in tone

* See *Works*, iii. 371.

from the essays of his youth. He is not now the Socrates of the *Apology*, on his defence, but the Socrates of the *Republic* and the *Timæus*. Not that he departs from the principles with which he began—that were impossible; but he has learnt that the world's wisdom is not contained in the dark saying that *esse is percipi*. The knowledge of God is still to be sought by the path on which he travelled in youthful hope; and the knowledge is man's highest wisdom. But we know 'in part' only, though indeed *we know*. 'Minute philosophy,' the charlatanism of the shallow writers of the time he is still as bold to unmask as in those matchless dialogues which were the fruit of his American leisure. But he has less temper, as life advances, for controversy. And as in pure philosophy, so in the region of theology. He lets us see once or twice how meanly he thought of religious disputations. 'The Church would thrive and flourish beyond all opposition if some certain persons minded piety more than politics.*' 'If we proportioned our zeal to the importance of things; if we could love men whose opinions we do not approve; if we knew the world more and liked it less; if we had a due sense of the Divine perfection and our own defects'; † then could we be in the way to promote

* *Works*, ii. 91.

† *Ibid.*, iii. 250.

the knowledge of God and of His Blessed Son our Lord.

As we recall on this day of thanksgiving, my brethren, the memories of past generations, as we sing 'the praise of great men and of our fathers who begat us,' we cannot but feel that the inheritance of honour to which we have succeeded brings with it inspiration no less than example. The study of such a life as that of George Berkeley surely has its lessons of courage and wisdom for all of us, old and young, teachers and taught, in these altered days. The splendid courage which will not shrink from misrepresentation in the effort to proclaim what is felt to be true: the still more noble courage, whose root, as Plato tells us, is a knowledge of the things really to be feared,* which will face the difficulties and obligations of life without the protection of popular approval: that highest courage of all, which will make the venture of faith, in spite of fightings and fears within and without, which will count all things but loss 'for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord'; these will still appeal to young and ardent souls.

But it is no unthinking or unreasoned venture which Berkeley will commend to you. The religious life is the truly rational life. 'This is Eternal Life,

* See *Republic*, iv. 7.

to know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' For He who is the Way and the Life is also the Truth. Let Berkeley's voice speak to us once more of the spirit in which that highest wisdom shall be gained. 'Truth is the cry of all, but the game of a few. Certainly, where it is the chief passion, it doth not give way to vulgar cares and views ; nor is it contented with a little ardour in the early time of life ; active, perhaps, to pursue, but not so fit to weigh and revise. He that would make a real progress in knowledge must dedicate his age as well as his youth, the later growth as well as first fruits, at the altar of Truth.'*

* *Works*, ii. 508.

BISHOP JOHN STEARNE