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JOHN HENRY BERNARD Trinity Monday Discourse, 1960 @@

by A. A. Luce.

At 11 o'clock in the morning of July 5th 1892 twelve hundred distinguished persons in academic robes issued from our Front Gate, and walked in procession, led by a regimental band, to St. Patrick's Cathedral for our Tercentenary Thanksgiving. Dr. Bernard had charge of the arrangements. The papers next day were lyrical about it. It was Bernard's first big success in affairs ; it illustrates his talent for organisation and his feeling for ceremonial ; and that colourful procession itself which could hardly be repeated today is no bad symbol of Bernard's own career-which was a unique, dazzling cursus honorum from the College to the Church, and back.

John Henry Bernard was born in India one hundred years ago next month. His father, an engineer on the railways, died young of sun-stroke; and his mother, a courageous woman, was left to rear two young children on a very small income. In the bracing school of poverty Bernard early learned the lessons of industry and self-discipline; his diaries which he kept for life testify to his capacity for hard work and his attention to detail. Entering College at the age of fifteen he took a few honours in classics and history, and made mathematics and philosophy his main subjects, graduating in them with Senior Moderatorships in 1880. Four years later Fellowship closed-to quote the sub-acid words of a memoir of him by a colleague who was not a

@@ Sources for the facts are, Archbishop Bernard, by R. H. Murray, London, 1931 ; the Register of Trinity College, and personal knowledge.

Fellow- "Fellowship closed a brilliant academical career".[@] In 1886 he took Holy Orders - the first Fellow to do so since the Disestablishment. The religious life, Bernard wrote,^{@@} "is the truly rational life", and it is very rational for one dedicated to the pursuit of truth and wisdom in a College named as ours is named, to seek to serve the Church of Christ - the eternal Wisdom of the Father.

Bury and FitzGerald, Bernard's younger friends and colleagues, were cut out for specialism ; but Bernard's intellectual interests were too wide and varied for specialist, and his older friends, Salmon, John Gwynn, and Mahaffy did well to lead him into that spacious realm of learning, called divinity, where theology, philosophy, languages, and history can each play a part. In those fields Bernard worked throughout life, and worked with two hands. Some fifty-nine publications stand to his credit in our Library catalogue; they are not all of lasting value, of course ; but they are all good work, useful when written. His major contributions include the following :

Translations and expositions of Kant's Kritik of Pure Reason and Kritik of Judgement.

Studies in Irish antiquities, notable the Stowe St. John and the Donnach Airgid.

Editions of Butler's Works and of the Odes of Solomon,

Commentaries on the Pastoral Epistles, 2nd Corinthians, and St. John's Gospel.

@ John Henry Bernard, by N. J. D. White, Dublin, 1928, p. 4.

@@ Peplographia Dublinensis, London, 1902, p. 81.

On this occasion I ought to mention his Peplographia Dublinensis, a collection of eight Trinity Monday Discourses on eminent sons of this House ; it includes a worthy discourse on Berkeley by Bernard himself, and in his Preface Bernard names some alumni worthy of commemoration who have not yet received that honour.

Of Bernard's mathematics others must speak ; that he was a distinguished philosopher is beyond question. He deserves much credit for his part with Mahaffy in an English edition of a very difficult book, Kant's Pure Reason, that went to three editions, and his own edition of the Judgement went to two editions. He was not a Kantian ; his decisive note at the end of the Dialectic deplures its negative result, speaks of Kant's 'proton pseudos', and assigns a propaedeutic value only to the Kritik. Nor was he a Hegelian, though there is substance in "the certain Hegelianisms.. of my younger colleague" which Mahaffy in his characteristic Preface thought fit to disown. Philosophy was not Bernard's lifework ; it was in the background of his teaching, adding breadth and depth and clarity ; for the rest he probably acquiesced in the common conception of philosophy as ancilla theologiae.

Shortly after his election to Fellowship Bernard married his cousin, Maud ; it was a happy marriage, and they had two sons and two daughters.

As a Junior Fellow Bernard was active in College politics ; he took a prominent part in the Reform movement of his day, agitating for the admission to the Governing Body of representatives of the Junior Fellows and the Professors. The article on Bernard in the Dictionary of National Biography describes him as "a leader of the malcontents", and that article was written by another 'malcontent', who himself was pars magna of the same movement.

When Salmon became Provost in 1888, Gwynn succeeded him as Regius professor of Divinity, and Bernard took Gwynn's place as head of the Junior

Year. Archbishop King's Lecturership, founded in 1718 was raised to the rank of Professorship during Bernard's tenure. He held it for twenty three years, save for a few minutes in 1902, when on being elected Dean of St. Patrick's he vacated his Fellowship and Lecturership, and was at once re-elected to the latter.

These were vintage years for our Divinity School. Gwynn and Bernard, assisted by Newport White, Lawlor and other fine scholars raised the school to the heights. The students numbers were large, and in brain and brawn. Murray, Bernard's biographer, magnifies his hero's part, but is less than fair to Gwynn. For instance he stresses Bernard's constant care for that important gymnasium, the Theological Society, But he omits to mention that Gwynn, even in old age, slept in College on Monday nights to attend "the Theo", and entertain the students afterwards. The Gwynn-Bernard régime was a happy duumvirate of complementary forces. Gwynn leaned on Bernard for extramural contacts and public policy. Bernard leaned on Gwynn for pure scholarship and pastoral experience. Bernard appealed more to the head and Gwynn to the heart. The Junior Year yielded an intelligent, instructed churchmanship; and the Senior Year crowned it with the devotional spirit, and the love of God and man. The late Dean Wilson has written warmly about Bernard's influence upon his students, saying "There must be many bishops and priests throughout the empire who owe him more than they can express." Murray pushes it too far when he says that Bernard "changed the face of theological thought in Ireland," and became "a pervasive power throughout the whole Anglican Communion."@

@ Op. cit. p. 86.

Bernard was a dominating personality, and his students either liked him intensely and gave him all, or they did not. A handsome man with blue eyes, an attractive smile and engaging manners, Bernard was a social asset in any drawing-room. In the lecture-room in cap and gown and in the pulpit in surplice and stole he was an impressive figure, tall, pale, ascetic, the embodiment of authority and conviction. His thought was clear and sober, and often comprehensive and cogent. His voice was not the equal of his thought, and lacked qualities that lend wings to words. His sermons read well, but lost in delivery. Here is a fine climax from his discourse on Berkeley, "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..." @

On two subjects Bernard was masterly the existence of Deity and the authority of the Bible. His presentation of the chain of traditional proofs, pruned and polished by his Kantian studies, gripped the hearer's mind, and stands out in memory, like the chain of Carlingford mountains seen from Three Rock Mountain on a clear day. On the textual criticism of the Bible and the higher criticism Bernard focussed for his students all that was best in contemporary thought, and in many

@ *Peplographia Dublinensis*, p. 81.

minds he excised the superstition of verbal inerrancy, and substituted an intelligent belief in the divine inspiration of the Good Book.

Of Bernard's nine years' tenure of the Deanery, little need be said here. That such an exceptional man left an exceptional mark there is probable, but hard to prove. In 1903 and 1910 he secured princely benefactions from his friend, Lord Iveagh for the Cathedral restoration. He examined our monuments and muniments, and wrote a history of the Cathedral, which revised by Dr. Oulton, is still on sale. He calendared the Dignitas Decani, a valuable collection of medieval documents, recently published by the late Newport White for the Irish Manuscripts Commission.

Now let us raise our eyes and see Bernard on a wider stage. Through his writings and the prestige of his Deanery he soon became known in England, and by early middle life he was an acknowledged leader, consulted by great men in affairs of Church and State. He was Select Preacher before the Universities of Oxford and of Cambridge, and a frequent visitor to their College Common Rooms. Doctors Ince and Driver of Oxford and Doctors Swete and Burkitt of Cambridge and Archbishop Davidson of Canterbury were his friends. Armitage Robinson, Dean of Wells, was his intimate friend and collaborator, and when Robinson became Dean of Westminster, Bernard preached in the Abbey almost every year. He reviewed for the Guardian, examined for the Indian Civil Service, and, curiously corresponded with Gladstone about Butler's ethics.

When the Kaiser's warlike intentions became obvious, British statesmen sought a rapprochement with Russia, Kaiser's intentions and the invitation of the Speaker of the House of Commons Bernard went to Russia in 1912

with a party of distinguished public men to return a visit paid by representatives of the Russian Duma. Bernard kept a journal of the trip which makes tragic reading today. The delegates attended sessions of the Duma and the Holy Synod ; they met Grand Dukes and Duchesses, patriarchs, metropolitans, bishops and archimandrites, and in a setting of diamonds, emeralds, and cloth of gold they were presented to the Tsar and Tsaritsa. Bernard must have had a premonition ; for he wrote that the Tsaritsa "had her hand on the shoulder of the little boy who is the heir of all this splendour.. and who will be the absolute ruler, if he lives, of 140 millions of people". Sunt lacrimae rerum.@

For the old régime in Ireland, too, the writing was on the wall, and destiny now enters the drama of Bernard's life. In his younger days he had declined to be considered for a bishopric ; but when in 1911 the House of Bishops chose him for the see of Ossory, he obeyed the call, and four years later he was summoned to the archiepiscopal throne. Political changes in Ireland were imminent, and grave responsibilities rested on the Archbishop of Dublin in those grave days ; and though his heart was sore for his son who fell at Gallipoli, Bernard was soon deep in affairs of state. He took a leading part in the Irish Convention of 1917, and all who took part in it recognized his clear vision, patience, tolerance and tact. The hour had found the man ; and after Dr. Mahaffy's death the Lord Lieutenant wrote to Bernard on 8th June, 1919, "The King has been pleased to approve Your Grace's appointment as Provost of Trinity College." The circle was complete. Our first Provost and our last Provost, appointed by the Crown were Archbishops of Dublin.

@ R. H. Murray, op. cit. p 260.

Bernard's acceptance of the appointment was criticized at the time. Looking back on the event, we see it had to be. Only a Trinity man could have taken the helm in those rough seas ; and there was no other Trinity man available of sufficient weight and proved ability. The change from a sacred calling to a secular was not unprecedented. In emergencies priests and bishops have even taken up arms ; and this was an emergency. Those who accept the spiritual basis of all existence will not exacerbate the distinction between sacred and secular, especially if they have worked out the formula given by St. Paul on Mars Hill to the university folk of Athens and all time, In Him we live and move and have our being.

Bernard never ceased to be a bishop, and he continued to sign himself as such. He was too clear-eyed to be dazzled by prizes. He had long since taken the measure of plaudits and placets, hisses and non-placets. Plenty of both came his way. He was ambitious, but ambitious to do his duty ; and he did his duty as he saw it. There must have been some sacrifice of principle and ideal ; for he was a strong churchman with strong views on the historic episcopate. We all have to make such sacrifices at times. The best must bow to the good in the hurly-burly of life. It seems à propos to mention that I once heard Bernard expound the famous words of another great John Henry. "And with the morn those angel faces smile which we have loved long since, and lost awhile." The 'angel faces' are not those of our loved ones, Bernard suggested, but the ideals of youth which tarnish and fade towards evening ; but

which we may hope to see again radiant and smiling when morning comes.

Trinity College has good reason to be thankful for Bernard's decision. Those were anxious days for us. Our future was uncertain. College rents and revenues were down. The war losses of the teaching staff were enormous, particularly those of the tutor-fellows whose income derived from fees. By personal approach and tireless pen Bernard pressed our claims, and though he never saw full justice done, he secured grants-in-aid sufficient to tide the College over the worst.

On his return to College as Provost he found the new machinery of College government working smoothly, and more or less as he had planned it years before ; and the great majority of the members of the Board cooperated harmoniously with him in the never ending task of keeping College up-to-date.

With the student-body he was not so successful. Bernard never had the 'common touch' that bridges distance and the years ; yet the welfare of the students, moral and material, was his constant care. He instituted the buffet-lunch for them with Mr. Johnston's help, and he set Jean Montgomery to reform the kitchen. With the help of the brothers, Thrift, he set up the Dublin University Central Athletic Committee and revived the athletic clubs, casualties of the war. He won us friends among the citizens of Dublin by ceding to the city the Provost's corner of Nassau Street. To him and Sir Thomas Molony we, I believe, owe our legislative autonomy, and the consequent consolidation of our statutes, without which later constitutional changes would have been well-nigh impossible.

Our Library owes him much ; when some English publishers refused

to supply books due under the Copyright Acts, he successfully asserted our rights ; he initiated the building of the Hall of Honour, and took the first steps in library expansion. He widened the range of subjects taught, effected administrative reforms, and strengthened external contacts. Lecture attendance was enforced, and that was perhaps the greatest, single administrative reform of the century. Chairs of Spanish and Bacteriology, Departments of Education and Commerce, and a Lectureship in Italian were instituted, and our links with Magee College, the Training College, and the Ecole Normale were established. It is a remarkable record of advance in a period of political uncertainty and financial stringency, with little or no assistance from the Government. To Bernard's wise policy and to his faith in God and in the future of the College no little credit for it must go.

On the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury Bernard went to Canada in May 1925 for an ecclesiastical occasion. He was taken ill there, and came home a stricken man. He died more or less in Harness on the 29th of August, 1927, and was buried in the grounds of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Samuel Johnson said on his death bed, so Boswell records, "I will take no more physick, not even my opiates ; for I have prayed that I may render up my soul to God unclouded." With that thought Bernard linked Christ's refusal of the opiate cup on the Cross. Bernard, too, refused an opiate on his death bed. It was an eloquent action, telling more clearly than words could do whose he was, and whom he served.