

# George Salmon 1819-1904

A Trinity Monday Discourse, 13 May 1991

by *T. D. Spearman*

It is not inappropriate as we move into our quatercentenary celebrations to look back a hundred years to the last such major commemorations, and it is especially fitting that in our memorial discourse today we remember and honour George Salmon who, as Provost, presided over the College tercentenary celebrations. Salmon's initial attitude towards the proposed festivities was a distinctly cautious one. Mahaffy was chairman of the planning committee and indeed of most of its sub-committees. We read in McDowell and Webb<sup>1</sup> of the clash as his "tremendous appetite for magnificence and display found itself curbed by the financial caution of the Bursar (Stubbs), and by Provost Salmon's strong distaste for anything savouring of ostentation." In the event most were agreed that the commemoration was a great success; distinguished guests from home and abroad joined in an impressive programme of events, spread over four days, watched with interest by the wider population of Dublin. The Provost managed to put aside his initial reservations and seems to have thoroughly enjoyed the whole affair. He combined dignity with affability in appropriate proportions; his intellectual stature and distinction were recognized by all, despite his own natural modesty and his friendly and unassuming manner; to his colleagues, distinguished guests and to the public at large he was the ideal representative of his College on this proud occasion.

George Salmon was born in Cork in 1819 and went to school there. He entered College at the age of fourteen: was elected to Scholarship, then on the basis of an examination in classics, and took first place in the mathematics moderatorship examination in 1838. In 1840 he won the Madden prize and in the following year was elected to Fellowship. He proceeded, in the usual way for a Fellow, to ordination, becoming a deacon in 1844, the year in which his first mathematical paper was published, and a priest in 1845.

From the beginning of his College career there were two strands to Salmon's academic interests: mathematics and theology. For the first twenty years mathematics was to dominate, although for most of that time he also lectured in the Divinity School. He was a tutor,

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and, from 1848 to 1866, Donegall lecturer in mathematics. He was the obvious man to succeed to the Chair of Mathematics when this became vacant in 1862 but it was Michael Roberts and not Salmon who was appointed. Roberts, who was just two years older than Salmon, was a respected and serious mathematician but he never attained the distinction and international recognition which was accorded to his colleague. Admittedly, although the last of Salmon's mathematical books, *The Geometry of Three Dimensions*, was published in that year, 1862, it would take some years yet and several editions in many languages before their worth would be fully acknowledged. In fact Salmon did not apply for the chair; when the board gave notice of its intention to elect a professor to succeed Charles Graves, who had resigned on becoming a senior fellow, only two of the junior fellows applied — Roberts and Townsend. What apparently had happened was that when McNeece, who held the Archbishop King's lectureship in divinity, had died just a month before, William Lee, who was first in line in the divinity school to succeed McNeece, had given Salmon to understand that he would not be a candidate. Under these circumstances Salmon would have expected, if he so wished, to be appointed to the Archbishop King's position, which although called a lectureship carried the same salary of £700 as the mathematics chair and a similar status. Unfortunately Dr. Lee then changed his mind and Salmon, presumably having agonized as to which of the two positions he would choose, found himself with neither.

It was evident by 1862 that theology was competing seriously with mathematics for Salmon's main interest. Thomas Hirst, an English geometer, during a visit to Dublin in May of that year, some months before the question of the Professorship arose, wrote in his journal

the principle of division of labour is not adopted as it should be in Trinity College. Salmon, whom all recognize as their ablest man, divides his time between theology and mathematics. Report says that he is soon to be a bishop. For my part the more I know him the more I respect him. By nature he is a simple minded, modest man but he is endowed with an intellectual power and a capability of work such as we rarely meet.<sup>2</sup>

Hirst had first met Salmon two summers before when he visited him at his home Maidabrook in Dundrum. The journal entry for that occasion records

we had an early and wholesome dinner and then accompanied by his

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eldest son took a long walk to the top of the neighbouring mountains. He is a very simple man and in appearance very awkward. Our mathematical conversation was very instructive. He is a great calculator, fond of calculating for its own sake. I do not class him amongst the high mathematicians however. The mere ready-reckoning element is too prominent in him. My day with him however was a very pleasant one.

Hirst dined on Commons during his second visit, on Sunday evening, May 4, 1862. He called to Salmon's rooms at 5 p.m. where he was introduced to the Bishop of Killaloe (Fitzgerald), Salmon's other guest that evening. They then adjourned to the dining hall where Hirst sat between Salmon and Stack, the Regius Professor of Greek; across the table were Jellett and Stoney (then Secretary of the Queen's Universities) and further down the two Robertses, Stubbs and Leslie. As he described it

Salmon was a good deal occupied with the bishop and my neighbour Stack's conversation was of little interest to me. Stoney and Jellett were discoursing on the merits of the Bishop of Oxford as a public speaker and his controversy at Oxford with Huxley on Darwin's hypothesis. It was evident that neither was acquainted more than superficially with the subject and Jellett's tone scarcely pleased me. He spoke *ex cathedra* and dogmatically. It appeared to me too that his attention was too divided between his subject and the Bishop opposite him.

Hirst was a close friend of Huxley and had his own opinions on this subject. He ventured to observe that "although no doubt the consequences of any theory on religious belief lent to the same an increased importance in the eyes of thoughtful men, it was on the other hand a fact to be regretted that the fear of consequences to orthodox faith frequently prevented otherwise competent men from fearlessly pursuing enquiries of a purely scientific character." This observation was greeted by "a significant silence" fortunately relieved by the call for second grace.

The next morning Hirst met Salmon again who told him that his new work on Surfaces was just finished. During their conversation Hirst asked him if he cared to become a Fellow of the Royal Society. Salmon said that he would consider it an honour but had never yet been consulted on the subject. Hirst's diary notes "I must make his work known here." The following December he submitted the nomination certificate carrying the signatures of Cayley, Lloyd, Boole, Spottiswoode, Kirkman, all signing from personal knowledge, and Salmon was elected FRS the following April. It was

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Hirst who later nominated Salmon for the Society's Royal Medal which was awarded to him in 1868.

In 1866 the Regius Professorship of Divinity fell vacant on the election of Samuel Butcher as Bishop of Meath. The Board minutes of 20 October record "It was resolved that the election to the vacant Professorship of Divinity be held on December 22nd on the usual statutory conditions and that the Revd. Dr. Salmon be informed that the Board are prepared to elect him to the office." Salmon was not entirely happy about the statutory conditions, particularly that which would require him to resign his Fellowship on being appointed to the Chair. The Regius Professor received a good salary, £1,300 per annum, compared with £700 paid to the Professors of Mathematics or Natural Philosophy, but in resigning his Fellowship he was foregoing the expectation of in due course becoming a Senior Fellow and enjoying the influence which went with this as a member of the Board and potential College officer, not to mention the generous financial remuneration to which the seven seniors were entitled. So a communication from Dr. Salmon to the Registrar contained a proposal to place the Professorship of Divinity on a new footing whereby the salary would be reduced to one thousand pounds, the balance to be used to raise the salaries of the assistants, while allowing the Professor to retain his Fellowship on the understanding that he would resign from the Chair on being co-opted to Senior Fellowship. The Board thought it undesirable to make these changes — the Provost (Mac Donnell) alone dissenting, and asking that his dissent be recorded, considering that Dr. Salmon's proposals would be of much advantage to the College and the Divinity School. So the conditions were left unchanged and Salmon, when on 22nd December he was duly elected as Regius Professor, resigned his Fellowship as was required.

From then onwards mathematics took second place to theology and as the years went by received less and less of his time. He explains in the prefaces to the later editions of his books that his other commitments had rendered him unable to keep pace with the progress of mathematical discovery and that he had been dependent on the assistance of his colleagues, especially Cayley, the Sadlerian Professor in Cambridge, and Cathcart in Trinity, to carry out the necessary revisions. He was Regius Professor until 1888 when, following the death of Jellett, he became Provost.

The appointment of Salmon as Provost was a natural choice which was generally welcomed both within the College and outside. By then, although he had not done any substantial new mathematics

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for twenty years, his books had gone into new editions and achieved wider recognition; he had also established himself as a significant theologian. Moreover, in the re-organization of the Church of Ireland, following its dis-establishment in 1869, Salmon played a central part and displayed such qualities of leadership and sound judgement as would give every confidence in his ability to head the College. In political terms the choice of Salmon should not have posed any difficulty for a conservative government. It seems however that the appointment was not achieved without a certain amount of political intervention.<sup>3</sup> At Jellett's funeral Samuel Haughton was observed to be moving very actively among the attendance, singling out in particular the bishops who were there and inviting their perusal of a document to which they affixed their signatures. The document was a statement that Dr. Salmon's position in the world of science, literature and theology rendered in the interests of the College his appointment to the Provostship imperative. It had apparently been learned that Lord Londonderry, the Lord Lieutenant, had already written to the Prime Minister recommending one of the Senior Fellows, almost certainly Carson. In those somewhat unsettled times political reliability would have been uppermost in the mind of the Lord Lieutenant and Carson's firmly held conservative views were well known. Besides, Salmon was not a Senior Fellow, although he would have been if he had not had to resign his Fellowship on becoming Regius Professor. Haughton is said to have telegraphed the Prime Minister to withhold his sanction to the appointment of the nominee of the Irish administration till he had received that document which would reach him the following morning. Whether or not this intervention played any role, within three weeks Salmon had begun his sixteen year term as Provost.

As an aspiring mathematician in the 1830s Salmon could not have chosen a better time to enter College.<sup>4,5</sup> Bartholomew Lloyd, as Professor of Mathematics, then of Natural Philosophy and finally as Provost, had completely reformed the teaching of mathematics and restructured the School. In 1835 Mac Cullagh became Professor of Mathematics, Humphrey Lloyd held the Chair of Natural Philosophy and Hamilton was Andrews Professor of Astronomy. It was not surprising, given Mac Cullagh's influence, that Salmon chose to be a geometer. He seems to have shown no interest in physics despite the exciting work in optics in which all three of his Professors were engaged. For a brief period, to Hamilton's delight, he dabbled in quaternions — in a letter written to Ingram in 1857 Hamilton says: "Salmon is getting on so awfully fast in Quaternions that if I

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don't take care we shall get into some contest of priority. It is a genuine pleasure to me to believe that in Salmon I shall have a worthy successor, and may he much excel, even in quaternions, myself!"<sup>5</sup> But this interest was short-lived. He incorporated an appendix on quaternions in the first two editions of his *Geometry of Three Dimensions* but dropped it from later editions on the grounds that this information was now easily available elsewhere. In his last years Salmon dabbled in number theory for his own amusement but otherwise, outside geometry, his only other serious mathematical interest was in algebra where he collaborated with the English mathematicians Cayley and Sylvester in their study of invariants and covariants under linear transformation. This algebraic work had a direct bearing on geometry, which for Salmon was probably the motivating interest.

Salmon had a considerable technical mastery in algebraic geometry and the ability and energy to carry out quite formidable calculations. He obtained some beautiful results, such as the demonstration, developed in correspondence with Cayley, that the cubic surface contained twenty-seven straight lines. But his main contribution to mathematics was not through any major original result of his own; it was through his four books: *Conic Sections*, *Higher Plane Curves*, *Lessons Introductory to the Modern Higher Algebra*, and *Geometry of Three Dimensions*, published between 1847 and 1862, that he achieved fame, and influenced the development as well as the teaching of the subject. These books went through many editions with substantial revision and the introduction of new material; they were also translated into French, German and Spanish.

They contained a considerable amount of detail and many new results. Salmon maintained an active correspondence with his mathematical colleagues in Cambridge and elsewhere, giving him access to unpublished research which he was able to incorporate in successive editions.

The reception of these books was not entirely uncritical. Some found them difficult and felt that complicated points were often not adequately elucidated. Others criticized their structure as lacking overall coherence. Salmon's friend Hirst wrote: "I had often noticed that his books, although excellent as a collection of theorems, gave no compact rounded view of the subject, and this defect was at once explained when I learned that he writes his books in a fragmentary manner, beginning to print before he has concluded what shall be the precise nature of the book".<sup>2</sup> But to Felix Klein, Professor at

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Göttingen and one of the leading mathematicians of his day, this form was not a defect, but a virtue:

These books . . . are not systematic expositions or rigorous developments; rather they are calm and fluent accounts, in a comfortable and conversational style, of the many beautiful results of algebraic geometry. The most recent results were always included in the new editions; the loose form of the work made it possible to do this without disturbing the structure of the whole. These books are like delightful and instructive walks through forests, fields and gardens, in which the guide points out now this beauty, now that strange phenomenon, without forcing everything together into a rigid system of gapless completion . . . We all grew up in these flower gardens; here we gathered the basic knowledge on which we were later to build.<sup>6</sup>

Salmon's approach to philosophical questions was a rather basic down-to-earth one. Bernard in his D.N.B. article says that although he was an omnivorous reader he had no taste for either metaphysics or poetry. His view of geometry was a purely conceptual one. A circle is a circle! It was known that in algebraic geometry, the usual equation which represents a circle was also satisfied by complex points giving additional branches to the curve described by the equation. Salmon was not troubled by this.

We know what a circle is before we know anything about the equation, and any interpretation of this equation differing either by defect or excess from our previous geometrical conception, must be rejected. . . . if these curves differ from a circle in form and properties, then it is an abuse of language to speak of them as branches of the circle, merely because they can be represented by the same equation . . . ; it is to confound two distinct ideas, because they can be expressed by the same symbol; it is, in short, no better than a mathematical pun.<sup>7</sup>

Here we see Salmon the polemicist, sure of his own ground, the same trenchant style that he would put to powerful use in theological disputation. But he could also be more subtle. When asked to comment on Sylvester's argument that one could conceive of spaces of dimension higher than three and hence they should be considered as a legitimate part of geometry, Salmon's response was, "I do not profess to be able to conceive of affairs of four dimensions [but] I advise you to believe whatever Sylvester tells you, for he has the power of seeing things invisible to ordinary mortals."<sup>7</sup> Irony was a favourite technique: he published a paper arguing that one cannot understand the fourth gospel without appreciating St. John's particular use of it.

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Salmon had a good sense of humour and a sharp wit. During a discussion on corporal punishment when Mahaffy claimed that he had only once been caned in his life, and that was for telling the truth, Salmon intervened to say "Well, it certainly cured you, Mahaffy". To someone who asked "After all, Dr. Salmon, where was your Church before the Reformation?", he returned the rhetorical question "Where were you before you washed your face this morning?" His humour could have a slightly malicious edge. When the portrait of Samuel Haughton, by Sarah Purser, which hangs in the Common Room, was first unveiled, Salmon's comment was: "Excellent, excellent, you can just hear the lies trickling out of his mouth."

Salmon was also painted by Sarah Purser, just before he became Provost — this portrait too hangs in the Common Room. Another Salmon portrait, by Benjamin Constant, painted in Paris ten years later at a cost to the College of 8,000 francs (which was £320 at the time), hangs in the Provost's House. The marble statue by John Hughes, which is now placed close to the dining hall looking out on front square, was commissioned and subscribed for by friends and colleagues after his death; it was executed, also in Paris, from photographs and installed in College in 1911.<sup>8</sup>

Salmon's most important theological work was as a New Testament scholar. His *Introduction to the New Testament*, published in 1885, was a strong defence of the orthodox Protestant position as he saw it, emphasizing the historical validity of the gospels. It argued forcefully against the form of criticism which had been pursued by Baur and his colleagues at Tübingen. It is fair to say that Salmon's greater strength lay in his ability to analyse the ideas of others and to respond critically to them, rather than in building up a systematic statement of his own. Newport White, who succeeded to the Divinity Chair in 1930, puts it well:<sup>9</sup> "although his *Introduction to the New Testament* and his *Lectures on the Infallibility of the Church* are both in the first rank of books on these subjects, he could not be described as a great theologian. His was not the constructive mind which makes great affirmations on moral or spiritual matters; he was essentially a critic with the instinct for pulling down rather than building up". White goes on to make the more general comment, "This has always been the intellectual temperament of the University of Dublin"! But in conceding this as a limitation on Salmon's part, we should not overlook the learning and the strength of argument which he brought to bear, or the vigour with which he conveyed his robust and resolutely held Protestant convictions.



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The concept of papal infallibility ran directly contrary to those convictions. It not only over-ruled the individual conscience but it meant that questions of fundamental importance to our lives were to be exempted from rational analysis or criticism. Salmon shared with Jeremy Taylor the rule of practice that "whatsoever is contradictory to right reason, is at no hand to be admitted as a mystery of faith".<sup>10</sup> He believed, not that one should expect to prove the basic tenets of faith, but that in accepting these one does so by an act of judgement, and in making that judgement reason plays a crucial role. His book *The Infallibility of the Church*, published in 1888, argues cogently, on scriptural and historical grounds, against the claim of infallibility. It was regarded as a classical statement of the Protestant position in response to the definitions of the first Vatican Council. Reading it today we need to remember that the conventions adopted in religious controversy were rather different then, otherwise we might feel slightly uncomfortable at its bluntly uncompromising tone.

Lest we over-emphasise Salmon's conservatism on theological issues, it should be said that he wrote on evolution, arguing that there was no conflict between Darwin's theory and a belief in God as the author of nature. He considered that the pressure of the conflict with unbelief would draw Christians closer together but that the claim to infallibility was shutting out the possibility of reconciliation with Rome. By arguing against it he was trying to do something to remove the main obstacle to the reunion of Christendom.

Salmon's wife had died before he became Provost and he lived in the Provost's House with his younger daughter Fanny. Of his four sons and two daughters only Fanny and the eldest son Edward were to survive him. Salmon had the good fortune to be Provost during a period when the reputation of the College could reasonably be said to have been higher than ever before or since. There was no apparent need or even desire for change and Salmon was well-suited, by temperament and inclination, to lead the College through a process of quiet development and consolidation. The one major reform which arose during his Provostship was the admission of women students, which he resolutely opposed, only reluctantly conceding at the very end of his term when there was no longer a board majority to support him on this issue.

In the conduct of day-to-day business he would seem to have been more efficient and business-like than might be suggested by the impression of vagueness or absentmindedness which has

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sometimes been conveyed. For example, when the astronomy professor Sir Robert Ball wanted some building work done at the observatory he obtained a tender for it which he brought to the Provost, who went immediately with him to the Bursar's office where Stubbs and Ingram were present. They agreed to approach the Royal Society for a grant but failing that promised that the College would supply the funds and directed him to go ahead with the work. The tender was accepted within the week.<sup>11</sup>

Not surprisingly, on at least one occasion he had to bring Mahaffy to heel. Mahaffy described such an incident, when he was an examiner for Fellowship, as follows:<sup>12</sup>

My free speaking about the stupidity of one of the candidates was assumed to imply that I had treated him unfairly. Provost Salmon actually demanded to see the papers I had marked, and had them tested by two other Fellows — an insult never before or since offered to any examiner here. When my results were justified the Provost and Board never even offered me an apology!

One can feel Mahaffy searching for something to throw back in the Provost's face, but he had no suitable ammunition. The best he could do was to point back to his family origins. Salmon's father, albeit a respected linen merchant in Cork, had been in trade: "Of course I knew that Salmon, though a great and good man, was no gentleman, but had I even a small independent income to support my family, the College would never have seen me again." Salmon's more measured and accurate comment was that Mahaffy "owes his trouble to his own indiscreet way of talking which led me to think he was a partisan and his habit of overstating any case in which he is interested".

Despite his own distinction in research Salmon was in no doubt that the primary responsibility of a university was to teach. It was of course desirable that the Fellows should be active in scholarship, and a reputation in research was important for the College, but it was teaching which had the primary claim on the College's resources. This attitude was highlighted in 1899 when the Board found itself faced with an unwelcome Pandora's box.<sup>1</sup> It had set up a small committee to consider the possibility of introducing some separate instruction in electrical and mechanical engineering. Fitzgerald apparently succeeded in hi-jacking this committee, in bringing all the science professors on to it and broadening its terms of reference to consider the needs of the science departments as well as engineering. Their report was that the minimum sum needed

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was £57,000 of capital and £4,000 a year additional recurrent expenditure. One can imagine the Board's reaction — its formal, perhaps surprisingly restrained, response was to ask the committee to reconsider its figures with a view to making all possible economies, and to separate the expenses necessary for the immediate teaching of students from those proposed for "mere research".

In the process of revision which followed the dis-establishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869 Salmon played a crucial role in achieving an outcome whereby, despite the strong efforts of the evangelical wing within the Church to achieve a radical revision, the prayer book which emerged preserved its central continuity with that of 1662. The outcome achieved two particularly important objectives: it preserved a sense of unity within the Church, and it established a basis of comprehensiveness and tolerance which was necessary to achieve that unity and which has remained a positive feature of the Church of Ireland.<sup>13,14,15</sup>

The spirit of the exercise was captured in the closing paragraph of the preface to the revised Prayer Book:<sup>16</sup>

And now, if some shall complain that these changes are not enough, and that we should have taken this opportunity of making this Book as perfect in all respects as they think it might be made, or if others shall say that these changes have been unnecessary or excessive, and that what was already excellent has been impaired by doing that which, in their opinion, might well have been left undone, let them, on the one side and the other, consider that men's judgements of perfection are very various, and that what is imperfect, with peace, is often better than what is otherwise more excellent, without it.

In the synod debates and in the committee rooms Salmon's was a dominant influence, without which it is unlikely that such an outcome could have been achieved. If we were to ask what lasting influence Salmon had left and where the effect of his actions could still be seen today, perhaps the answer is in the Church of Ireland. However admirably he discharged his office as Provost it would be stretching credulity to suggest that but for him the College today would be a significantly different place. Nor would the course of progress in mathematics or in theology have been altered. But the Church of Ireland today does, I believe, still carry the stamp of Salmon's influence, as exercised in the revision debate and through the divinity school which he dominated for so many years.

In supporting a comprehensive outlook for the Church, Salmon sought to be tolerant of alternative view points provided they could

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be accommodated within the limits which for him were defined by biblical truth. But if these limits were in danger of being breached then he was vigilant in their defence. He was critical both of the Tractarians and of those English liberal churchmen who, in a controversial volume called *Essays and Reviews* published in 1860, advocated and pursued a critical and historical study of the Bible, following the pattern already well established among German theologians.

Two of the authors of that volume were prosecuted in the Church courts and found guilty of denying the inspiration of holy scripture; one of them, a man called Wilson, who was Vicar of Great Staughton in Huntingdonshire, was also found guilty of denying the doctrine of eternal punishment. This verdict was overthrown on appeal by the Privy Council who in relation to eternal punishment said that they could find nothing in the Formularies "which would require them to condemn as penal the expression of hope by a clergyman that even the ultimate pardon of the wicked who are condemned in the day of judgement may be consistent with the will of Almighty God". This judgement prompted the sarcastic comment that the Lord Chancellor had "dismissed Hell with costs, and took away from orthodox members of the Church of England their last hopes of everlasting damnation."<sup>17,18</sup>

Salmon joined the fray by preaching two sermons in support of the orthodox position, which were promptly published. He dealt summarily with his opponents: Mr. Wilson, "of whose accuracy and scholarship I have come to form no very high opinion", and F. D. Maurice, "than whom no writer that I know has more the gift of using language to conceal his thoughts". At this stage one of the Junior Fellows, J. W. Barlow, published an essay in which he condemned the doctrine of eternal punishment as constituting a serious obstacle to the acceptance of Christianity by many modern minds. This drew a rebuke from the Archbishop of Dublin, which allegedly was the reason that Barlow never again officiated as a clergyman although he remained a faithful member of the Church of Ireland. Salmon republished his sermons with a detailed response to Barlow, who responded with a new pamphlet equally critical of Salmon. Each referred to the respect and personal regard he had for his colleague — which, of course, should not be let stand in the way of the pursuit of truth.

As the years went by Salmon became less dogmatic in his interpretation of biblical truth. The ultimate authority was, for him, the individual conscience, and as certainty lessened so the bounds of

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tolerance grew wider. His resistance to papal infallibility would not have wavered, although he might have expressed himself in somewhat different terms, but it is unlikely that the older Salmon would have been so categorical in rejecting Barlow's views.

Salmon was eighty-four when he died, having been Provost for sixteen years. He retained both moral authority and actual control throughout that time. He was respected and admired and was in a real sense master of his College. There was no irony intended by Mahaffy when he said that the Provost was a great and good man — he was generally perceived as such. His conservatism, although it chafed at times with some of the younger men, was not out of keeping with the mood of his time. The College was united and secure under his leadership: when he died parallels were drawn, not unreasonably, between the sense of real loss and sadness which was felt within the College community, combined with the feeling of an era having come to an end, and the similar reaction to the death of the Queen just a few years before.

Grief has its place but it seldom stands in the way of ambition. On the day that the Provost died Anthony Traill was on the mailboat heading for London to lobby his political friends, while Mahaffy made equal haste to encourage his friend George Wyndham, the Chief Secretary, to write to Balfour on his behalf. The contest for the Provostship between these two formidable opponents was anticipated in the following story<sup>1</sup> which even if it were apocryphal ought to be true, so authentically does it convey Salmon's sardonic sense of humour. Shortly before he died Salmon is said to have told a group of Fellows of a curious dream he had the previous night. He was dead and preparations for his funeral were in progress. In his dream he saw himself carried across the Front Square to the Chapel in an open coffin, escorted by the Fellows and Scholars, many of them weeping and sobbing. His coffin was laid in the Chapel "and then" as he described it "I sat up in my coffin, whereupon Mahaffy and Traill wept louder than ever".

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### Notes

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2. Thomas Archer Hirst, *Journals*. These journals, in typescript, are in the archives of the Royal Institution, Albermarle St., London.
3. *The Freeman's Journal*, Dublin, 25 January 1904. This article includes various anecdotes and reminiscences prompted by the Provost's death. Not all of these are accurate but that relating to Salmon's election, from which I have drawn here, is plausible and I see no particular reason to question its reliability.
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