



Robert Yelverton Tyrrell

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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Hermathena*, No. 125 (Winter 1978), pp. 7-21

Published by: [Trinity College Dublin](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23040586>

Accessed: 20/11/2012 09:31

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Robert Yelverton Tyrrell

by W. B. Stanford

The Yelverton part of his name came from his godmother, a Miss Yelverton of County Kildare, a kinswoman of the legal luminary Barry Yelverton, Viscount Avonmore, whose portrait hangs in our Dining Hall.¹ The Tyrrells are said to have come to England with William the Conqueror, and Hugh Tyrel was in Ireland under Strongbow. But Robert Tyrrell's branch of the family did not reach this country until the latter part of the eighteenth century when his grandfather, William Henry, came to Dublin as a printer. He had four sons and a daughter. Three of his sons graduated here—Gerald (a classical Scholar of the House) in 1817, Henry in 1825, and Francis in 1834.² Two of these became clergymen, Henry, our Robert's father, and Francis. The fourth son, William Henry, was the father of George Tyrrell, the celebrated modernist theologian, and also of a very promising young classical scholar who died young, William Gerald, commemorated by the Tyrrell Medal. He would probably have become a classical Fellow here if he had lived.

Robert was born on the twenty-first of January 1844 at Ballin-garry, County Tipperary, where his father was curate. Soon afterwards his father was appointed rector of Kinnitty in what was then called King's County. Kinnitty is still a pleasant little village, some of it probably little changed since Robert's boyhood there—the village green with a stone-channelled stream flowing through it, the parish schoolhouse with neo-gothic windows and gables, a curious pyramidal family tomb of the Bernards of Castle Bernard in the old graveyard, and the large late-Georgian rectory across a field from the church. From above the village there are fine views eastwards towards the Slieve Bloom mountains and westwards over the broad plain to the Shannon. It was a place where an imaginative boy could have grown up very happily.

But it was not to be so. In 1849 cholera broke out in Dublin. The rector of Kinnitty hurried up to administer the sacrament to his brother-in-law, caught the infection, and died three days later. His family left their green pastures in the midlands and came to Dublin.

By that time there were six children in all, three sons and three daughters. All three sons graduated here. William, the eldest, won

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first scholarship in 1855 and first classical moderatorship a year later, and eventually became a High Court judge in the North West Provinces of India. Next, Henry Francis won third scholarship in 1857 and beat Mahaffy for first place in the classical moderatorship in 1859. (But he was a year older than Mahaffy.) He also won a special distinction that neither Mahaffy nor our Robert achieved—the Berkeley Medal in 1859. He became a Joint Magistrate in the Bengal Civil Service.

With so much classics ahead of him in the family, Robert might well have sheered off into mathematics or philosophy. But he did not, partly, no doubt, from natural inclination, but partly too, perhaps, in a spirit of friendly emulation towards his brothers. Coached by them, and with only six weeks at a private school in Hume Street Robert entered Trinity College in 1860 at the age of sixteen. After that he remained here continuously for fifty-four years. Already he showed excellence in his most brilliant talent, winning entrance prizes for composition in Greek and Latin prose and verse. A fine *cursus honorum* followed: a classical scholarship in his first year, most unusual then, and very rare still; first of the first in classical moderatorship and fourth of the first in ethics and logics with the resulting studentship; the Vice-Chancellor's prize in Greek verse; and prizes at the Fellowship examination, when he was only twenty-two and twenty-three. He won his Fellowship at his third attempt in 1868 after exceptionally brilliant answering. Three years later he was elected professor of Latin in succession to the notable philologist W. H. Ferrar. His senior colleague, Arthur Palmer, the latinist so highly praised later by A. E. Housman, had to wait nine years until Tyrrell vacated the Latin chair for the regius professorship of Greek in 1880.

Meanwhile another major star had appeared above the College's horizon,³ J. B. Bury, who had been elected a Fellow at the uniquely young age of twenty-three in 1885. Tyrrell yielded the regius professorship to him in 1898—the College perhaps had already guessed that Bury might look elsewhere for classical preferment. Tyrrell then took over Mahaffy's chair of ancient history and by doing so became the only person ever to have held the three classical chairs. It was hardly a good appointment scholastically, for by common consent he was no historian. But those were the days when Fellows of Trinity were deemed to be omniscient. More congenially for Tyrrell, in the same year he succeeded Palmer as public orator, an office which he held with great distinction until 1904.⁴

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On Traill's election to the provostship in March 1904, Tyrrell was co-opted as a Senior Fellow. As such he had to resign his professorship. He was then appointed registrar. Here a minor mystery arises. Oliver Gogarty, who wrote so affectionately and admiringly—one might almost say adoringly—about Tyrrell, states in one of his biographical books⁵ that on one occasion Tyrrell failed to take the minutes of a Board meeting with the result that the Provost proposed a motion demanding his resignation. Gogarty goes on to tell how he and some other friends concocted an elaborate scheme for restoring Tyrrell's morale after this affair. I can find no record of it in the minutes or elsewhere. Yet Gogarty gives such a circumstantial account that I find it hard to believe the incident is entirely imaginary. Possibly Gogarty, writing many years after the event, was dimly remembering an occasion in February 1911 when Tyrrell was accused of failing to send a letter on the Board's behalf. But he denied this at the Board, and the Board accepted his repudiation and there was no question of censure by the Provost. (Tyrrell's total salary, by the way, in 1906 was £1386-14-0.)

In 1913 when Tyrrell's health had begun to fail he was not re-elected registrar. Rather ironically he was then appointed catechist and senior dean. The catechist was, nominally at least, responsible for the religious instruction of the students every Saturday during term. Tyrrell was not the ideal choice, for he was known to be an agnostic. But he was a mild agnostic. One of Tyrrell's admiring pupils, Newport White, afterwards regius professor of divinity, has told how at a catechetical examination he, White, failed both a son of Traill and a son of Tyrrell. Traill stormed angrily at a mere lecturer's audacity in 'sticking' a Fellow's son. Tyrrell thanked him, adding 'I consider an acquaintance with the evidences of Christianity as part of a gentleman's education'.⁶

In one incident Tyrrell showed less than his customary urbanity about matters of religion. In 1903, when feelings were running high on the question of founding another university in Dublin to accommodate the catholic majority, Tyrrell printed a sonnet, called 'Holy Ireland',⁷ describing in distinctly offensive terms his opinion about the effect of Roman Catholicism on the Irish people. Naturally there were strong protests. Tyrrell published a letter of explanation that only made matters worse. He also wrote some similarly wounding remarks in a review of George Moore's *The untilled field* in *Macmillan's magazine* in the same year. As usual in these matters, it was the College that suffered most as a result. Tyrrell's bitter

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language on this occasion was highly uncharacteristic of the general style of discourse of the ‘benign doctor’, as his friends called him. One may surmise that the factious spirit of the era, combined with earlier religious stresses and strains among Tyrrell’s own relations, were the main causes of this outburst.

As a scholar Tyrrell’s first notable publication was a little volume of classical compositions—*Hesperidum susurri*, published in Cambridge in 1867 when he was only twenty-three and not yet a Fellow. With him as joint authors were an older and a younger scholar of the house in classics, Thomas Bellingham Brady and Max Cullinan. We can see several of Tyrrell’s enduring qualities embodied in this little book. First, its careful elegance, both in its print, with red gothic lettering as well as black Roman type, and in its general format. Tyrrell himself in his dress, conversation and writing was a model of disciplined elegance. Secondly, there is the modesty of its title and preface, too modest perhaps for ardent nationalists with its implication that Ireland was a kind of *ultima Thule*, far removed from such haunts of the classical muses as Cambridge, Oxford and Shrewsbury. Tyrrell was consistently modest about his own achievements and constantly willing to praise the achievements of others. Thirdly, in the introduction there was a hint of playfulness and lightness of touch, which was both Hibernian and Tyrrellian. Fourthly these *Whispers* displayed a most remarkable talent for this particular kind of classical versification on Tyrrell’s part.

I say ‘this particular kind’ because it was essentially different from the composition of original verses in classical Latin or Greek or Hebrew such as had been freely practised in western Europe since the renaissance—as when, for example, the Fellows and scholars of this College produced forty-eight pages of polyglot elegies on the Countess of Cork in 1630.⁸ What Tyrrell and his colleagues were doing was a glorified form of the regular school exercise of turning good English into poor Latin or Greek as one critic has described it. This is not the place to discuss its merits as an adult pursuit. Celebrated scholars have taken sharply opposing sides on that. The undeniable fact is that in the later part of the nineteenth century the ability to compose polished and sometimes brilliant versions in Greek or Latin was widely regarded as the hallmark of accomplished classical scholarship in the older universities and public schools of Ireland and Britain. And now, with *Hesperidum susurri* in 1867, for

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the first time Trinity College, Dublin had displayed authentic brilliance in this subtle skill.

These graceful murmurs had a significance far beyond their modest pretensions. They were in fact the earliest sign of a renaissance of classical scholarship in the 'silent sister'. In 1867 Mahaffy, five years older than Tyrrell, had not yet produced a classical work nor had Palmer. The College's reputation in the first half of the century had rested mainly on its mathematicians. But now classical scholars from across the water could detect a fresh tune from the Dublin classicists. The generous praise of Jebb, the Anglo-Irish Cambridge scholar, was particularly encouraging to Tyrrell. It began a life-long friendship.

Soon other Trinity men showed that they could compose almost as well. To encourage and display their talents and his own Tyrrell founded what, so far as I know, was a unique journal of its kind in academic circles—*Kottabos*, so called from the Greek symposiastic game.⁹ In the three volumes published under his editorship from 1874 to 1881 there are one thousand and thirty two pages of verse and prose compositions, grave and humorous, comic and tragic. They were not solely classical. Many members of the College who afterwards became famous in the world of letters—Oscar Wilde, Edward Dowden, Arthur Perceval Graves, Standish O'Grady, T. W. Rolleston and others, experimented in various literary styles in *Kottabos*. Much of it was light-hearted, even frivolous at times, as in R. F. Littledale's proof that Max Müller, chief champion of the solar myth, was himself a solar myth, or in Tyrrell's superb skit 'Herodotus in Dublin'. Tyrrell had no use for sententiousness and pomposity in scholarship. And that was an attitude very much in the Hibernian tradition of classical scholarship tradition from Columbanus to 'Father Prout'.

I have emphasised Tyrrell's brilliance in classical composition—we remember how he had won entrance prizes in all forms of it—because in a way I think it was his most distinctive gift as a classical scholar. He used it for instruction as well as for literary pleasure and entertainment. Like Aristophanes he knew that parody could be an effective form of literary criticism, both positively and negatively. But he never parodied the work of writers whom he admired. Robert Browning was a perpetual target, Browning about whose translation of the *Agamemnon* Tyrrell remarked that he found the Greek most helpful in understanding it. Occasionally, I think, Tyrrell went rather too far in displaying his special talent. It was

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hardly justifiable to print modern specimens of Ciceronian and Plautine Latin in the introduction to editions of those authors. But nearly every scholar has his intrusive hobby-horse, and Tyrrell's generally proved its authentic descent from Pegasus.

I wish there were time here to give full examples of his supreme artistry in this genre. May I quote just two short passages? The first is an excerpt from his version of Thomas Hood's poignant poem, *The bridge of sighs*, beginning

One more unfortunate,
Weary of breath
Rashly unfortunate,
Gone to her death;
Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care,
Fashion'd so slenderly,
Young and so fair.

Tyrrell renders this with a quite perfect use of a Latin dimunitive form:

Ah, misera sortis,
pondere fessa!
ah, temere mortis
viam ingressa
tollite facile
onus tam bellum
corpus tam gracile,
tamque tenellum.

And the rest of his long version is almost as exquisitely phrased. At the opposite end of the poetic scale, the terse epigram, he was equally skilful. Here is his superb word-mosaic on the theme of 'nothing in excess' as over-preached by Matthew Arnold:

*'Μηδὲν ἄγαν' ὑμνεῖς · ἄγαν ὑμνεῖς · οὐ τοι λήγεις ·
ὦ γαθέ, μηδὲν ἄγαν, μηδὲ τὸ 'μηδὲν ἄγαν'*

A free English version—not his: his epigram was original—can give the meaning but not its lapidary terseness:

'Avoid excess' you've preached till you've annoyed
Even those friends who praise sobriety.
Why not match deed with precept, and avoid
Preaching 'Avoid excess' excessively?

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That was a doctrine—and a genuinely Greek one, too—that was likely to appeal, a little dangerously perhaps, to students like Wilde and Gogarty.

I do not want for a moment to suggest that Tyrrell was light-weight as a scholar. In 1879 he produced the first volume of one of the largest editions of a classical author ever to appear in Ireland, *The correspondence of Cicero*, which eventually comprised seven volumes. It took great courage and determination for a young scholar to undertake this enormous task. It is true that much of the work for the succeeding volumes was done by his younger colleague and devoted admirer Louis Claude Purser. But Tyrrell's exquisite sense of Ciceronian idiom and style prevailed the whole series. It remains, in the handsome green and gold binding of the Dublin University Press, an impressive monument to sensitive and erudite classical scholarship. Tyrrell's other editions of Latin authors, Plautus and Terence, showed a similar mastery of language, idiom and style.

He was never, to my mind, quite so felicitous in his Greek publications, or indeed in his Greek compositions, though he was very much a Hellenist at heart with a particular liking for Pindar, Sophocles and Aeschylus. His editions of the *Bacchae* of Euripides in 1871—when he was only twenty-seven—, and of the *Troades* (1882), and his translation of Aristophanes' *Acharnians* were well received and widely used. But while they certainly elucidated several difficulties in the text and language, they hardly, as I venture to judge them, achieved a deeper understanding of the plays. On the other hand several of his textual emendations were generally accepted and are likely to hold permanent places in critical editions. His obituary in *The Times* justly referred to his 'fastidious scholarship'.

Besides these books, and many articles in classical journals, Tyrrell played his part in maintaining popular interest in the classics with frequent contributions to the English literary reviews. Several of these were republished in his *Essays in Greek literature* (1909). Here, too, one can enjoy his fine sense of style and his unsurpassed gift for translating and for quoting apt parallels from authors ancient and modern. (He had a very good memory.) But I may not be alone in feeling that to read these essays now is like being driven through rich and varied scenery in a comfortable and elegant limousine without ever stopping to ask searching questions about the thoughts and feeling of the inhabitants. In the lectures on Latin

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poetry that he gave in Johns Hopkins University in 1893—the only time that Tyrrell travelled far beyond Ireland and Britain—he uncharacteristically launched an attack on Horace, finding him shallow and insincere in his sentiments and ‘incorrect’, to use Tyrrell’s word, in phrasing. About one ode he remarked that it ‘contains figures and expressions which do not conform to modern taste’ and that ‘it would be a charming little piece were it not for the last two stanzas’.

In contrast with many scholars of his time Tyrrell rarely used scathing language about other men’s views on classical authors. One lapse in his edition of the *Bacchai* provoked a sharp response. He called that honoured printer-scholar of Paris, Stephanus (Henri Estienne) *mendacissimus*. Jebb took him up on this in a review and urged him not to try to revive the asperities of German scholarship. Tyrrell gracefully recanted with the remark that in his hot youth (I quote) ‘I think it was my opinion that one might say anything in Latin’, and he followed Jebb’s advice for the rest of his life. But another sharp remark¹⁰ in that edition of his hot youth haunted our Classical School right down to the nineteen-thirties, as I have personal cause to remember. A regular question in Sir Robert Tate’s *viva voce* on the *Bacchai* was ‘What did Tyrrell?’—and there was a wealth of reverence in his voice when he spoke that name—‘What did Tyrrell describe as being probably the worst emendation ever made?’ I ruefully recall that I lost a mark on that, as I had assumed the examination would be on what Euripides wrote and thought, not on Tyrrell’s pronouncements.

My emphasis on Tyrrell’s urbanity and his lack of truculence and bellicosity in his writing is likely to have prompted a contrast in the minds of hearers familiar with the leading personalities in the College from the 1870s onwards. How did Tyrrell and Mahaffy get on together in such close proximity? At first, when both were young men establishing their positions in different fields, there was no great cause for friction. Mahaffy had managed to get a new chair in ancient history for himself in 1870. He was a strong advocate of the new classical archaeology, which had received its great stimulus from Schliemann’s recent discoveries at Troy. In contrast, Tyrrell discounted history except as providing backgrounds for literary studies: as for archaeology, to quote a letter of his friend Gerard Manley Hopkins in 1888, he (Tyrrell) was sorry ‘to see our Universities gone after epigraphy, excavation and so on, mere handmaids to the neglect of the mistress scholarship itself’.¹¹

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Such an attitude was bound to provoke Mahaffy. But there is no evidence for acrimony between them at first. On the contrary it was plain that they were prepared to work together in the interests of scholarship. Both were on the editorial board of *Hermathena* at its foundation in 1873. Ten years later they quarrelled sharply in the pages of their own journal.¹² An edition of Herodotus by Mahaffy's close friend A. H. Sayce of Queen's College, Oxford, was reviewed very severely in *Hermathena* in 1883 by Tyrrell and his junior colleague Thomas Maguire. The asperities of the protracted controversy that followed, with a reply and a re-joinder and a surrejoinder, have been described elsewhere, and need not be dwelt on here. But a new piece of information can be now added: Tyrrell regrettably carried his attack on Sayce and Mahaffy into the English press. He published in the *Fortnightly review* for January 1888 a witty dialogue entitled 'The old school of classics and the new' in which the ghosts of three great classical scholars, Bentley, Porson and Madvig, as well as those of Euripides and Shakespeare, lamented the decline of pure scholarship and the rise of what one of these scholars called Schliemannism—'a synonym for pretentious sciolism and uncandid special pleading'. Sayce and Mahaffy were clearly the main targets, and Oxford's system of making classical students abandon literature for history and philosophy after five terms was implicitly condemned. (Bently and Porson were, of course, Cambridge men, like Jebb.)

From that time on there were two factions among the older men in our Classical School. Palmer, Maguire and later John Isaac Beare generally supported Tyrrell and 'pure scholarship'. Bury, as a historian, and Henry Stewart Macran, the Hegelian philosopher who began as a classicist, sided with Mahaffy. Louis Claude Purser, that kind, peace-loving scholar, tried to keep the peace between them, but his heart and his scholastic predilections were with Tyrrell. In their later years, when Tyrrell had become an invalid, Mahaffy and he became more friendly, but, if Gogarty and Walter Starkie are trustworthy witnesses,¹³ they used to banter with each other fairly wounding when they came together. When Mahaffy once referred to Kinnitty as a place where they once burned an old woman as a witch, Tyrrell, according to Gogarty, replied 'Well after all it's only a case of delayed burial, which you so grievously exemplify, Mahaffy'. Or again there was Tyrrell's often repeated remark, 'I have never quite forgiven Mahaffy for getting himself suspended from preaching in the College Chapel. Ever since his sermons were

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discontinued, I suffer from chronic insomnia in church'. Or again, 'Wilde got most of his superciliousness from trying to imitate Mahaffy'.

In many ways they were very different: Tyrrell, ironical, self-depreciatory, persuasive, generous in praising others, keeping safely within the limits of his own intellectual scope, concerned more with style than with ideas; Mahaffy, boastful, provocative, versatile, bold to tread in areas where he was no expert, and interested in ideas rather than in style. Oddly enough in personal ethics the picture was reversed. Tyrrell was something of a boon companion and a bohemian (though never in his personal appearance). Mahaffy carefully observed the conventions of polite society and would prefer a formal dinner in a big house to the informality of Jammet's or the Bailey. Tyrrell was very popular with the students. They had an affectionate admiration for him, and a few like Gogarty were his familiar friends. Mahaffy was respected, but feared by them. R. M. Gwynn once described to me how he remembered both Tyrrell and Mahaffy watching cricket in the College Park. Tyrrell would be at the pavilion surrounded by a group of friendly students. Mahaffy would be at the far end, aloof and alone.

There was a similar disparity in their methods of teaching. Mahaffy would read his lectures rather loftily to a silent class. Tyrrell's method was more like a joint investigation with his pupils. He would provoke them into questions and suggestions, and would skilfully put their less lucid thoughts into adequate phrases, never emphasising their mistakes or defects. He had that invaluable gift for a teacher, the ability to see things from the point of view of his class. As Purser admits, this meant that Tyrrell's lectures were not (I quote) 'by any means highly systematic performances'¹⁴—and we know what that kind of phrase means in an obituary notice. In fact, Purser adds, 'the present writer has sometimes wondered what would have been his fate (Tyrrell's) if an education inspector . . . had heard such desultory conversations (as they might often be termed) and discovered that perhaps not more than twenty lines had been got over in the day'. But Purser and others had not the slightest doubt that Tyrrell's lectures were highly successful in stimulating, clarifying and stylising the minds of his best pupils—and among them besides Purser were Sir William Ridgeway, J. B. Bury, W. J. M. Starkie, J. I. Beare, G. W. Mooney, J. G. Smyly, W. A. Goligher and E. H. Alton, all honoured names in the annals of classical scholarship. Among the future men of letters who probably

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attended his lectures were Arthur Perceval Graves, T. W. Rolleston, J. M. Synge, W. M. Magee (John Eglinton), John Healey (afterwards editor of the *Irish Times*) and Oscar Wilde (classical scholar with Purser in 1873 and Berkeley medallist). Wilde had Mahaffy as his College tutor, and was at first his admiring personal friend. But when the dark days came, it was Tyrrell who gave his signature to Frank Harris's petition to the British Home Secretary for Wilde's liberation in November 1895, and he later wrote a compassionate review of Wilde's *De profundis*. Wilde, according to Harris,¹⁵ towards the end of his life said, 'I got my love of the Greek ideal and my knowledge of the language at Trinity from Mahaffy and Tyrrell; they were Trinity to me'. Wilde regarded Tyrrell as the better scholar of the two. Tyrrell's literary approach and his sense of style in speaking and writing would have especially appealed to him. Wilde also suggested that if Tyrrell had known less he would have been a poet. Some of Tyrrell's original poems support that view, and as a scholar his heart was never truly absorbed in the prose classics.

Another of Tyrrell's classical students, coming from Portora like Wilde and Purser, may soon become famous. This is John Sullivan¹⁶ whose cause for beatification is at present being actively promoted at Rome. But while Tyrrell no doubt helped Sullivan to win a senior moderatorship in classics in 1883 and soon afterwards to write one of the fiercest reviews of a classical book ever to appear in *Hermathena*, it is unlikely that he could claim any credit in guiding Sullivan towards the path of ascetic sanctity.

To return from saints to scholars: the hardest part of a biographical essay of this kind about someone who died over sixty years ago, and who left very few personal papers and no autobiographical writing, is to recapture the flavour of his personality. Also, unless such a person reaches fame early in life, or has a loving relation to preserve records about him in his earlier years, descriptions are generally confined to his later life—as exemplified by that saddening painting of Tyrrell in 1907 after illness had ravaged his fine features, which used to hang in the Common Room. There is another difficulty, too. Oliver Gogarty was the only contemporary to write extensively about him, and Gogarty was essentially an imaginative biographer. Indeed, to be blunt, though I enjoy and admire much of Gogarty's biographical writing, it is demonstrably very inaccurate at times. In what follows here I shall mention only those qualities and quotations in Gogarty's various accounts which seem consistent

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with what is known from other sources. At any rate Gogarty deserves our gratitude for having created a lively and likeable portrait of his beloved master when others failed to do so.

By general consent Tyrrell was classically handsome,¹⁷ witty and urbane, courteous, unfailingly kind and considerate and encouraging towards students, gentle and merciful in examinations. Until his death at the age of seventy from a prolonged and painful illness he exemplified the spirit of that enheartening word which the Greeks used when meeting and parting, *chairete*, 'be joyous', or in the old biblical phrase 'be of good cheer'. 'Filled with placid joy' is how Gogarty described him, and others have confirmed it: he was never, at any rate in public, moody or melancholy. That kind of temperament often goes with a certain carelessness about personal appearance and style. But Tyrrell was a supreme stylist in his dress and conversation, as well as in his classical publications. Gogarty¹⁸ portrays him in his grey, full-skirted frock coat, with his neat tie caught in a ring with a four-horsed chariot on it. He is walking slowly from his rooms in Number Four—where he had a butler in velvet and gold livery to receive guests—round the Front Square. He has a cherry-wood stick in his right hand. The other hand is behind his back with the palm turned outwards. The students greet him with a friendly smile as he passes them. He is happily on his way to meet friends for lunch. . . . As a host or guest he was very much the epicure and gourmet, not letting his generous hospitality sink into Roman excess, even though he is widely credited—if that is the word—with the remark 'There is no such thing as a large whiskey'. He never smoked, but took snuff gracefully. He rarely laughed, but often smiled.

By all accounts his conversation was quite as brilliant as Mahaffy's but in a different way. Mahaffy's was exuberant, far-ranging, imaginative, tending to overstate. Tyrrell's was controlled, confined usually to the topics he knew thoroughly, ingenious but not highly imaginative, and frequently ironical. It must have been a wonderful experience to hear the two of them arguing like Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Tyrrell's epigrams and witticisms were given sharper point by his high-pitched, almost treble, voice—'piping' or 'warbling' as Walter Starkie and Gogarty remembered it. Some of his remarks sound as if they were very carefully composed. After visiting an ill-educated *nouveau riche* who described his treasures as 'them things', Tyrrell commented 'Not ivory nor gold (a Horatian touch, *non ebur neque aureum*) moved my astonishment, but only

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his use of “them” as an adjectival pronoun’. When someone called him ‘perfessor’ he remarked: ‘He called me “per” instead of “pro” possibly with the idea of choosing a stronger prefix’. When he heard that George Moore was going to pillory him in a book to be called *Ave atque vale*, Tyrrell remarked ‘Moore, of course, thinks that *Atque* was a Roman Centurion’. (Gogarty¹⁹ says that this was the reason why Moore changed his title. Moore in fact did present an unpleasant portrait of Tyrrell in *Ave*,²⁰ but without naming him.) Of an eminent cleric, once a Fellow and afterwards Provost of the College, he observed: ‘Had he been at the wedding feast of Cana he would have soured the wine—thereby weakening our faith’. Regrettably few of his kinder aphorisms have survived. But that, I suspect, is the result of our Hibernian fondness for the satirical, and not Tyrrell’s fault, for in general, as I have already mentioned, Tyrrell was remembered for kindness in word as well as in deed. A long verbatim report²¹ of a speech to the Institute of Journalists in 1903 illustrates the more genial general side of his wit and humour.

Tyrrell died on the nineteenth of September 1914 in his seventy-first year after a long and troublesome illness. He had borne it with a finer virtue than dour stoical fortitude—with cheerful, uncomplaining courage. Thrombosis in his legs had first attacked him severely in 1899, when he was fifty-five. Then he had to give up his customary strenuous exercise, especially racquets and lawn tennis. After that, Purser says, he could not sustain his previous high level of intellectual interest in current matters. For an hour or two he could be intellectually as vigorous as ever but then his attention would flag. In the last few years of his life he was almost a complete invalid, not greatly in pain but wearisomely inactive. During that time he was affectionately cared for by his wife and family. He had always been happy in his domestic life. His wife Ada Shaw was a daughter of George Ferdinand Shaw, a Fellow of 1848, whose commemorative plaque is here with us in the G.M.B. Married in 1874, they had three sons and three daughters, one of whom, endowed with her father’s wit and style was a well-known figure in Dublin society until fairly recently—Dena Tyrrell, afterwards Lady Hanson. Her two sons, now professors of theology in England, rivalled their grandfather’s record of achievements in classics as undergraduates.

Long before his death Tyrrell had received many academic honours—honorary doctorates from Belfast, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Oxford and St. Andrews—and he was chosen as one of

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the original Fellows of the British Academy in 1901, with five other Irish scholars, (but not Mahaffy). One could quote many high and true tributes to his personal qualities from his obituary notices. But perhaps the best words to recall him with are what his Jesuit friend Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote about him in his prime: 'You would like Mr. Tyrrell. He is a fine scholar and an amiable man, free from every touch of pedantry'.²²

Notes

1. The main sources for this essay are: obituary notices in *The Times* and *The Irish Times*, 21 September 1914, in *T.C.D., A College miscellany*, 11 November 1914, and in *Proceedings of the British Academy* vii (1915-16); also the biography in *The dictionary of national biography* (by L. C. Purser), and *Autobiography and life of George Tyrrell*, ed. M. D. Petre vol 1 (London 1912), (which contains a historical account of the Tyrrell family), as well as the Tyrrell papers in the College's archives. For unpublished information I am indebted to four grandsons of R. Y. Tyrrell, the Revd. Professor A. T. Hanson, the Rt. Revd. Professor R. P. C. Hanson, Mr Gerald Thompson and Mr Lucius Thompson-McCausland, and to Canon R. H. Boyle.

2. Information about the careers of Tyrrells in the College is from the supplemental volumes to the *University Calendar* published in 1913 and 1951 and from *Alumni Dublinenses* ed. G. D. Burtchaell and T. U. Sadleir (London, 1924).

3. For the T.C.D. Classical School in Tyrrell's time see W. B. Stanford, *Ireland and the classical tradition* (Dublin, 1977) and the works cited there on pp 69 n.1 and 70 n.31.

4. For his orations see R. Y. Tyrrell, *Speeches of public orators* (Dublin, 1909).

5. *It isn't this time of the year at all!* (London, 1954) 133.

6. N. J. D. White, *Some recollections of Trinity College Dublin* (Dublin, 1935) 34.

7. In *T.C.D.: a College miscellany*, 14 November 1903. The ms. is in the Tyrrell papers. Cf. Fergal McGrath, *op. cit.* in n.16 below, 32-34.

8. See M. Pollard, *Hermathena* 109 (1969), pp 51-3 and Stanford, *op.cit.* in n.3 above p. 179 n.5. For Tyrrell's glee in detecting false quantities in the verse compositions of other scholars see *Hermathena* 14 (1907), p. 516.

9. For the history of *Kottabos* see *Hermathena* 115 (1973), pp 9-10. The contributions by Tyrrell and Littledale mentioned above were reprinted in *Echoes from Kottabos*, ed. R. Y. Tyrrell and Sir Edward Sullivan (London, 1906).

10. On *Bacchai* 860.

11. C. G. Abbott, *Further letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (2nd edn. London, 1956), p. 291. For further references to Tyrrell 1886-87, index to C. G. Abbott, *Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges* (London, 1935). Despite Tyrrell's scorn for archaeology he made a notably prescient remark in his slightly ironical oration as Public Orator when Sir Arthur Evans was receiving an honorary degree, comparing the inscribed clay tablets from Knossos with the *sémata lugrá* of Bellerophon in *Iliad* 6, 128. See *op. cit.* in n.4, 84. (I owe this reference to the present public orator Professor J. V. Luce.)

12. There is a fuller account of this quarrel in *Mahaffy* by W. B. Stanford and R. B. McDowell (London, 1971), pp 174-75.

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13. Gogarty's main descriptions of Tyrrell are in *As I was going down Sackville Street* (London 1937): cited from the 1945 edition here), pp. 288 and 321–39; *It isn't etc.* (see n.5 above), pp 52, 127–8, 131–44, 203; *Tumbling in the hay* (London, 1939), pp 75, 207–18, chap. vi ('*The benign doctor*'), and pp 207–18. Starkie's are in *Scholars and Gypsies* (London, 1963), pp 16, 114. Cf. Stephen Gwynn, *Experiences of a literary man* (London, 1926), pp 129–32.
14. L. C. Purser, *Proceedings of the British Academy* vii (1915–1916), pp 533–39.
15. Frank Harris, *Oscar Wilde* (London, 1938), pp 29 and 243–4. There is a letter from Harris to Tyrrell (dated 9 February with no year) about Wilde and his mother (and Shakespeare) in the Tyrrell papers, with the remark 'I wish I could get Mahaffy to write'.
16. See Fergal McGrath SJ, *Father John Sullivan SJ* (2nd edn. London, 1945) and M. Bodkin, *The port of tears* (Dublin, 1954).
17. See the photograph in *Hermathena* 115 (1973).
18. *Tumbling* etc. (see n.13 above), p. 75.
19. Gogarty, from whom these witticisms are cited, says in *It isn't etc.*, pp 127–8 (see n.5 above) that this remark by Tyrrell caused Moore to change his title from *Ave atque vale* to *Ave, salve, vale*.
20. *Ave* (1947 edn. London), pp 102–11. Cf. W. B. Yeats *Autobiographies* (London, 1926), pp 421–4, and *Letters*, ed. Allen Wade (London, 1954), pp 321, 547, 555.
21. *Daily Express* 23 Feb. 1902.
22. *Further letters* (n. 11 above).
23. Abbott, *Letters to Robert Bridges* (see n. 11 above), p. 233.